4 February 2026

Nauseated by nine o’clock again, I can’t get the slightest forward motion to even begin to work on anything. For weeks--maybe eight of them, an unforgivable section of a year--it’s been external imposition of non-activity, and now it is the utter stasis, quite familiar to me, in which every idea becomes embittered in the span between when I begin to cobble it together and when I lift a finger to work it out, and I never move. Last Friday, my last open day for painting, I gave myself a different task, because I felt deeply and consciously that if I strung together more than three or four days like last Wednesday I might never paint again. So on this gift of a day off work I set out to take a long walk up into the sunny hill and listen to everything I wrote in the last two or three months to clear my eyes. For a stretch that included neither the start nor the end I pulled together my (purely habitual, that is to say, unearned, like the product of caffeine) semi-usual enthusiasm to make the interlinear-exegetical notes that I pasted at the end of last month’s note document. Then I became once again locked into the stasis which the walk was supposed to be a decisive action against, feeling that even with these clearest eyes I can scrape together, still nothing I could make seems like it might eventually be good or worth making. So last Friday was the second of three or four days like last Wednesday, and the worst yet, even if the deliberate effectuation of exhaustion forestalled the red and bruised left arm and right hand.

I can’t see any good reason to, but I still feel like noting the things which seemed--relatively, or for relatively more seconds, or relatively frequently--palatable. In retrospect they seem to have in common that they all skirt painting proper. They may be compromised by this, vampirically deriving their charge or raison d’être from a tradition whose resources they fail to make good upon, coming off consummately empty for conjuring painting’s stakes as they (even in the same gesture) fail right there where they site themselves.

Duck fat

The stamp, or anything sigillographic

Anything alchemical

Strau, mainly, and on his fringes Sigmar Polke and Martin Kippenberger, though I can’t look to either of these latter two as directly without fizzling out; on a different fringe of his, Emma McIntyre, but I’m given pause even by the bare fact that I’m drawn to her paintings which once so forcefully put me off

So, I said “anything alchemical”; here’s three images locating that motion

Marc Kokopeli, mainly, and on his fringes a little cloud or mist of Gandt-things (Magnus Peterson-Horner and Jeffrey Joyal, the Aristotle Psychological Facility itself whose interior surface and ornament was actually in a Christmas-decorated dream of mine)

Gauze, and the thought that with a long roll of loose-filamented gauze--or, in a different version, with clingwrap--I could wind horizontally around a section (or all) of a very vertical small canvas, either over or under an overall stretching of some other substrate; and that, in the case of gauze (not clingwrap) and over (not under), in a version I could thickly saturate the surface (or the non-edge patch of the surface) with rabbit skin glue (or with traditional gesso, RSG immixed with marble dust or with chalky powder looted from the dust collectors at work) between each pass, in another version eventually cutting or rubbing away everything that is not laid down by the paste, and into the eventual textured mummy I will rub a suspension of Silicoil caput mortuum in linseed (because a global bright white is to be avoided): and the three-dimensional form will be the hand arranging the marks, as in a Hantaï without the unfolding, because the suspension will be broken or failing, the sediment already fucked to bits by months in the solvent, and so thinly distributed besides. There might need to be some kind of varnish to lock it into place and mitigate offgassing.

And these variations--ought they also all be sealed with a duck fat stamp? Perhaps that's a different grouping; and the seal can go in the site of a postage stamp, which is also a Polke-link if you hallucinate prodigiously enough ("Higher beings commanded: Paint the upper-right corner black!"), or in the central-to-lower-central position more wont for the old wax (a little to one side of what I sought, here is a watermark in a Descartes manuscript; I had been seeking an actual wax seal linked to a letter from his actual hand, because this sight would have been charged by the Nancy text, Ergo Sum, which taught me the word "la sigillographie")--Perhaps, as I say,

this is a different grouping, a different taxonomy.

And here I am picking up speed, speaking of “taxonomies” and talking once again like I can course through conjugations with the Muybridgean speed of light refracting severally through a prism, the speed, that is, of a Grotjahn or a Sayre Gomez who can speak of commissioning dozens of assistant-hours of photorealism with the levity of an AbEx wrist-flick. But I feel that these humble gestures--the ones, I mean, necessitated by the above taxonomy-moves and conjugation-motions, which is to say, the building of dozens of at-least-initially-notionally interchangeable supports

As far as the supports go, I have an idea, because yesterday I squirreled away some fifty or a hundred feet of bass cleat offcut, and I now have a fast way to use it. What’s the largest size, roughly, at a given aspect ratio, where the following exceptionally expedited recipe doesn’t require a crosspiece?: Mitre the cleat offcut and form a simple rectangle; glue the junctions and fix each joint with a single v-staple shot from the front, so that if the metal sticks out of the wood it just sticks into what will be the negative space between the bevel and the stretched fabric. Sand the sharp edge (the front face), and that’s all. If I want to get a little bit bigger, here is how I can add a crosspiece to the above: Glue a crosspiece to the back of the above, and fix the joints with pins from the back; then glue more (ideally flat, not cleated, but it doesn’t really matter: The cleat won’t be perceptible as long as the bar can eventually be flush to the wall) offcut to the rest of the rectangle, butt-jointing it to the crosspiece and clamping down each side’s length to dry, then after dry trimming the whole thing back down to a rectangle without hitting the pins. The idea of all of this feels nice as long as the depth of every bar can be kept strictly under an inch and a half.

And I am firing with ideas for dimensions and repeating. I am firing on the hot- and fast-burning empty heat of repetitions. I am firing on an imagination of paintings that I would not have been able to love at any point in my life before the last year or two. I am operating under a counterintuitive optimism that gestures as shallow as what I am getting into hereabove and herebelow will become (netting out their perceptual weight and referential baggage) lighter than air, and precisely thereby get off the ground; the materials are barely-there gauze and hose, which joins with neoprene to dance around Magnus’s cheesecloth, or a chickenwire mesh, or the fleece of Marc Kokopeli’s plinths, the ones on which he set those rings, the ones on

which he built diaper ATVs, the ones which (delightfully coherent-incoherent) “[informed] the exhibition with questions about the circularity of references to the fable of becoming an artist.”

These paintings--not mine, but the ones in my head--are even lighter, even skimmer of substance, than Kokpeli’s or Peterson-Horner’s or Strau’s or Krebber’s or von Bonin’s or Rapson’s: Honey, skin glue, caput mortuum, duck fat, negative space itself (sanding, with the hand or the festool or the dremmel), contest between the stamp and the gesture, synergy and common ground between them (as the gesture always maintains a living, tensile link between the eye and the hand, and the eye is always foveated, no matter how free the range of the conjugation of answers to the question of what to foveate it upon).

Thinning out the substance of my painting until the suspension breaks (like a sauce: cuisine), or, if it succeeds, is frozen in the very breaking, and is thus permanently splayed on that threshold, in that becoming.

I know I’m immediately walking back that thinning-out--but maybe by just enough, maybe only doing the bare minimum to maintain pictorial presence--when I say: The ideas I had near the beginning of my walk last Wednesday, couched in terms of copying after black and white photographies of Cézannes, are also, still, an angle I want to open these things up to, but not yet, it’s like a room that shares a wall with the room I want to stay in now, and the room that shares a wall with that room, in turn, is a room in which color might find a way back in, color to perpetuate (and, notionally, reveal the initial origin of) the supply of caput mortuum, color, in these neighbor of my neighbor, being the iridescence of the reflection on pencil marks, and the other-colored Goethe-fringes of these first taches; in both of these cases, color arrives onto the blank only, really, as a mist, a flickering mist, situating me in direct relation to--but necessary on the far side of, specifically on the far side of the transatlantic paintings of--Mondrian, in other words, where I always wanted to be. And, in neighboring rooms meandering out from a different wall of where I am now: If I am stretching these vertically-formatted paintings with stitched-together fabrics, I ought to plumb-line-grid the fabrics before and after stretching, say, to tense questions which were already inherent to their very-sheer materiality. In other words, I want to articulate the part of my perspective that gives these ideas a proximity to Supports/Surfaces, and articulate, in this proximity, my distance from them, in the fact that (unlike them, and like Hantaï) I will always end up back on a stretcher, a real painting, to look at, to aspire after the livingness (the pulmonary expansion) of any Matisse (which Hantaï always maintained, and Buren etc. did not; that was the cliff Buren fell off; Hantaï always toed the line of death-in-painting, but his paintings were, perhaps for that very reason, always breathing, breathing like a Matisse, breathing like Duchamp (himself the breather, not “like a Duchamp”)). I was materially imprecise. I meant that, when I bring the grid--the armature--back with the plumb line, here is how it will be done--and this thinning-out is a

corrective to my earlier armature ideas which were all already too much, all already too heavy, and I always got already lost in their tangles and was never able to elegantly rejoin them with (re-graft them onto) the basic map of the alchemical core of my whole espresso cup account which exists now only in mists and can only by the lightest and most careful of first-baby-steps be made real as paintings. First I plumb an armature onto a stretched rectangle. Then I plumb an armature onto a (pinned, unstretched) piece of neoprene, and subsequently stretch it; maybe it had been stretched before, and the eventual rectangle bounds erasably marked. Then I do this latter thing with a very different support, one which will register stretching but not nearly so much. Then I seam two neoprene scraps together in a vertical stack and do it again; then I seam a neoprene scrap with a Paris one and register how that difference differs/ registers; and so on, always drawing in a different way, first with charcoal and then with silverpoint and then with duck fat rolled with wax to be a crayon and then with skin glue and then with skin glue gesso and then with straightedge-sandpaper and then with a dremmel and--this is finally the way out of this room, and into contact with the Cézanne-found-image (traditional image, art-historical image, space-giving image: This is a complication, a little knot, which I might need to separate out, first establishing the use of a found image and the gesture of gestural copie by means of, say, a Pontormo drawing, and turning to Cézanne only later when I feel the presence of the drawing calling out to something more than its gesture, its curve, its line itself, calling, that is, into relief, which leads me to da Vinci and a different way to give life to a painting (rilieva gives the surface its own specific proper interest, and ought not be complicated with two many other dimensions, ought to be left on its own on that surface in order to maintain my ultra-skim barely-there line), which leads me, separately, to Cézanne and the side of him that I tried previously to distill: Just the first breath of space, just its first opening-out, just the barest and simplest presence of that same sense that I first learned from certain Jonas Wood interiors and landscapes and Balthus landscapes (“L’imprenable”?) which required years of inspection and trial and error in order to distill into real paintings that I can really make, now. (“Now” being something rather anonymous but which in retrospect I can maybe hope to individuate by means of Strau and Krebber, and not the Krebber whose imitation Tatol showed to be empty, namely, the Krebber who performs impotence, but rather on the other hand the Krebber whom Magnus Peterson-Horner showed me to be very much alive: The one who produces (and Magnus does it too, like him) exquisitely potent qualia by passing always through a needles-eye of paring-down; I add--and this is a superfluous extrapolation, as well as a reach--that the irreducibly interesting qualiae of Kokopeli, even just as described by Tatol, are in precisely the same vein: Conusmmately potent for the very fact of their paring-down, which, by the way, justified the childhood topos of both of these artists, the one via babysitting and the other via educational videography, a foundationally Modernist interest and the only one

among its peers (exoticism-fetishism, madness-fetishism) that still has legs this strong.)

I nearly lost my thread, but what I was about to say is this: That it is after the two separate neighboring rooms above independently arrive to that emergent common ground, after that, that they can be seen to share their own wall, and proceed from there into, I don't know, I don't know, hopefully I can at least keep myself as disciplined as I let on above at least until then, and then one by one I can charge these paintings with each of the other "suspect pleasures" in turn, like narrative and characterization and animation-motion and compositional complication (baroquing, as represented by the recombinations of armatures I have variously mentioned in the last couple months, recombinations often scaffolded with reference to specific talismanic paintings proper to my personal canon) and indulgent pre-constructed color chords (the readymade ones I have said I'd source from Grotjahn-Klimt or from Boscoreale-de-Kooning or wherever else I felt longevitized charge, as by contrast to the more basic vocabulary I will already have introduced, as described above, which is not quotably Stein-basic but which is, as I indicated, just one little step beyond Mondrian, by means of Goethe, or just what Mondrian could have learned from Goethe and did by the end) and--wow!--plaid, which I can show to be birthable from out of the verticals of the armatures I will already have, and, once I've put it into play, I can charge paintings with what Bella noticed in my recent plaid drawings, namely the difficulty of not just denoting it but of really making it palpable by strict means of grayscale drawing, say; and then I can charge other paintings with the dizzying sense of expansion that plaid often gives me; but always I will restrict myself to doing something with plaid that feels aligned with what I've always wanted paintings to do--in other words, I will not be doing with it what Trockel did, or what Polke or von Bonin did with found fabrics, it won't primarily be about its trash aspect at all, it'll be about its pictorial-proper resonances which aren't easy to draw out but which I trust myself to be able to see, things about space that you can see in edge-tensed frontal plaid with only 1.1 or 1.15 or 1.3 repeatable square- / rectangle-units in the frame (that you can almost see, actually, in Trockel, though it was never commented on in her work), or other things not about space but about form and relief that you can see in a drawing of Chardin's scarf or in Matisse's Manteau écossais.

I feel myself right about to lose touch with what I was feeling, right about to blink and throw all of this away. Here is one attempt to give answers to questions that make everything fray, answers that will staunch the hemorrhage:

Are some of the stretched bars aluminum panels backed with little aluminum cradles? And do some of these in fact have no stretched fabric at all, realizing the distinct possibility that a painting can also be an inscription-registration surface (and importantly a technē-enabled one, if we get into concerns about the faithfulness of the registration of a gesture, and the degree of resolution in the

registration’s presencing or re-conjuring of the gesture to the viewer--or, in a different line if we get into concerts about the degree of resolution in the painting’s eventual possible function in making possible the viewer’s hallucination of dreams of spaces and/or figures)? Yes and yes.

So, I’ve bought myself a handful of minutes. And here is something I’ve been about to say for several hours (it’s 2 p.m., and I’m coming back to interject just this thing that I’ve placeheld with the heading “deriving dimensions” after having to stop to make a schnitzel sandwich and then consequently failing to resume as always happens when I eat and I can feel my brain not working like a motor turning over and not starting when the ignition key is turned), an idea that reaffirms the almost shocking shallowness of what I am insisting defines this lighter-than-air line: But first a recollection of a story: Sometime near the very start of my time working at Custom Art Surface, when I thought I was going to completely restrict my use of the equipment and scrap to cutting panels from plywood, I was faced for the first time with a relatively open decision of what dimensions to pick, because until then I’d only obtained panels by deal hunting at Home Depot and most often returning empty handed and in any case only having marginal alternatives to option between. And when it was up to me, I searched online for the dimensions of certain square and nearly-square Mondrian paintings, because of, to be precise, two reasons. First, I wanted to conjure for my paintings a mode of viewing--a situation of distance, a kind of wall, say, and a site on the spectrum of what a painting asks from a body in front of it, what organs it engages, e.g. wrists or arms, brain or gut, preciousness or monumental dwarfing--a mode which I knew to be inaugurated best by Mondrian’s own paintings (note that this is somewhat more specific than something else, also true of myself at the time but less true to my experience I remember it: That at the time Mondrian was the painter I thought most about and that I wanted to link myself to him by lifting his paintings’ dimensions). Second, in the paintings I planned at that time to make, I wanted to do things in paint that were similar to what Mondrian did, and I wanted to do them by means (with forms and their relations) that were similar (here I intend “similar” in a slight generalization of the proper geometrical sense of the word) to the means (the forms and their relations) that Mondrian used, and I didn’t want to run the risk (or, in any case, to problematize the risk at that time) that such forms & relations would function significantly differently on different scales and in differently formatted rectangles. Some short time later, I learned from Peter that the dimensions--incorporating, that which is somewhat rare among CAS’s clients, half- and quarter-inch measurements--of Mark Grotjahn’s latest order were derived from the dimensions of certain paintings by Mark Rothko. He didn’t relay, or didn’t know, which ones or why. I felt exhilarated, vindicated, even, but also in a certain way prescient, and, most of all, proud, that I’d had what I thought was the same idea, independently. I didn’t think long whether his reasons for doing this included any of the reasons I listed above--the first

one that I was subscribing to, the second one that I wasn’t quite, and the third that I was in particular caring about. Now, it is very important to me to name these constituent concerns--braided or blurred together--for now strictly for the sake of saying that what I want to do involves their outright negation in favor of a shallowness which precludes them, and to say that I want again to derive dimensions for paintings of mine from paintings of others, but that I want to take these dimensions from certain paintings of Josef Strau, of Cosima von Bonin, of Mathieu Malouf maybe, and maybe one or two others, precisely because I have derived from each of these certain specific and delicately interrelated sensations pertaining to, among other things, notions of interchangeability, discreteness (discrete-object-hood), painting-ness, quiddity, fabric-stretched-on-stretcher-ness, and objects-filling-galleries (or objects-filling-walls)-ness.
From Tears and new tears at Greene Naftali:

Dimensions (not necessarily of works pictured) include:
Misunderstanding, 2018
28 1/4 x 20 1/4 x 1 inches (71.8 x 51.4 x 2.5 cm)
Contagiousness, 2018
24 × 18 x 1 1/4 inches (61 x 45.7 x 3.2 cm)
Facetiousness, 2018
20 x 16 x 1 inches (50.8 x 40.6 x 2.5 cm)
Indulgence, 2018
16 x 12 x 1 inches (40.6 x 30.5 x 2.5 cm)
From Ulysses at Greene Naftali:

Pictured: Replicas and dream directors for U, 2022, Soldering iron, tin wire, marker on canvas, 35 1/2 x 47 1/8 inches (89.2 x 119.7 cm)
From Church of Daffy at Petzel:

Dimensions include:
LE SNOBISME DE L’ARGENT
2023
Wool, cotton, fleece
76 1/2 X 53 1/2 inches
194 X 136 cm
SATAN! PLEASE COME BACK
2023
Cotton, silk, velvet, fleece
67 1/4 X 54 inches
171 X 137 cm
BACKSTAGE TALENT ONLY
2023
Wool, cotton, fleece, silkscreen
56 X 80 inches
142 X 203 cm
MAN WANTED
2023
Wool, cotton, fleece
73 3/4 X 53 inches
187 X 135 cm
BOY WANTED
2023
Heavy cotton, wool, silk velvet, fleece
76 1/2 X 62 ¼ inches
194 X 158 cm
DÄMONENRÄUMDIENST
2023
Wool, cotton, fleece, silkscreen
57 1/2 X 80 inches
146 X 203 cm
I saw this painting at MOCA and was filled with a warmth in the stomach and brought almost to tears.

D’accord (2002), 102 3/8 x 78 3/4 in. (260 x 200 cm).
I was delighted by the sensation of walking through this empty gallery, a sense of emptiness, surfacehood, shallowness, extreme reliance upon (and therefore extreme activation of) the very-few qualities or attributes or dimensions which were present.

Dimensions include:
22 ½ x 32 ½ in
38 ½ x 59 ¼ in
36 x 50 in
39 ½ x 60 in
46 ¼ x 62 in
32 x 39 ¼ in
43 x 60 ½ in
39 ½ x 69 ¼ in
28 x 39 ½ in
37 x 60 in
43 x 73 in
37 x 47 in
And here, picking up something I also started saying earlier, is a little drawing to make present the image in my mind of these rooms sharing walls; up until now, the image in my head has been scaffolded upon the little model in Jake Longstreth's studio onto which he'd pinned tiny printouts of his paintings' reference images to show how he'd hang them in a Hetzler space, a former residence with parquet floors, in Berlin.

And, absurd though this mind palace (which is right now a mind garret) feels, in the way in which it pathetically repeats for a second time that "carta" I made who knows how long ago (the first time I repeated it, as tragedy, was in that visionary first outpouring of my intention to make paintings by restretching; these new paintings use restretching, but not like that, not so hurried as that, not as free or underdetermined as that, not yet, because I cannot yet bear it); now, in the second repetition, in my guignol-farce mode, with flickering sincerity, maybe I can finally turn its conjugation-vision into objects that I can not only touch and manipulate and move around but, always the whole point, which I can also perceive in their lightness and in their barely-there but always-there aliveness. If I couldn't follow the "carta," how could I expect to follow this? Because this, finally, if it finally works, will be because it is finally sufficiently overdetermined. With the way I thought I could work with "trobata" and freely compose them into paintings, the prospective results were always laughable in the face of the Tatol-trained "now"-conscious critic that inhabits part of my seeing-eye mind, because that plan was (momentarily, even willfully, but not therefore forgivably) ignorant of the weight of precedent which made the scraps I did succeed in painting feel childish in the wrong way. Only now can I hope to be light enough, only now can I hope to be disciplined enough, only now that I've made it this simple.

Other questions are harder to answer because they're baser and

more practical, but I can’t help it, these are the questions that come into my mind.
What do I have to buy today? Wax, and a duck, and gauze, and thread, and I have to visit Daphne’s, and it would be great if we could find a new table so I can order an easel online so I can do those plumb lines, but I don’t have to do them quite yet. Once I’ve stretched what I made at Daphne’s, I will prepare two kinds of rabbit skin glue, including, for the first time, a traditional gesso.
Are these “the autobiography of Ludovic Nemo”? Yes. Autobiography by performance first, rather than by depiction, because with the latter there was already too much variable-doubling, what is a dream, what is a memory, what is a self-portrait. But the core of that fiction is still to be present from the first. The core of the fiction, the duck fat and the espresso cup and the caput mortuum and the horse dealers who are not yet visible but whose presence in the background, whose past and present threat, is the very force which bluntly necessitates this radical paring-back: If I ever fall off the tightrope that is this ultralight line, I fall back into the horse-dealers hands. That is the key to what they are. They may have caught me once; that is how I, Ludovic Nemo, arrived to Los Angeles; but their allure--for all that I will go to greatest lengths to make its presence felt, its pull palpable--must not catch me again. In every new room, I will toe their line, I will bring them close, and I will slip through their cracks. They are the suspect pleasures. The morne repetition of history is their threat; they are the weight of history itself. I’m speaking in mock-manifesto Modernese, and the words feel too clunky already; that is why I have to cover over these “suspect pleasures” with nice names like “suspect pleasures” and “horse-dealers,” cover them over once and for all and never so baldly name them again. I must now speak in this dream-language: They finally caught up to Ludovic Nemo in Lipp; his cheek still remembers the cold tile, and the worms-eye perspective of its recession; the duck fat is the material token--which is therefore alchemically active, because it functions by its sheer material presence, a pre-depictive (but not pre-pictorial) mark--which performs this fictive autobiography from the very first Ludovic Nemo painting, from the first, which is to say in the time before Ludovic Nemo makes possible (by way of progressive conjugation, and in particular the emergence of convergent horizontals out of a complicated conjugation of initially verticals-only armatures) the resource (which is also the allure! And which therefore must be indulged only to the very bare minimum) of the depictive representation of memory, first in just the worms-eye view of the Lipp tile itself, and only later in more fully narrative views, iterative characterizations of characters like the Maître, self-portraitures even, even dated self-portraitures which begin to indulge in a diarism that Picasso once dreamt of (with his precise dating & his offhand speculation about biography) and which I once held to be native only to music, best represented by Kurt Cobain in a live recording, say, and then bastardized by painting (first bit by bit, in diachronic virtuoso performance; this was preconscious but present in Velásquez, conscious and more present, then, in Manet, and

finally histrionically overpresent in the mutually contradictory Modernist poles of Surrealist automatism and AbEx gesture)--and, aside from these dated self-portraits, there can be Michelangelesque multifigure compositions indulging in yet more dimensions of the pictorialization of narrative, and so forth--and this was just one roughly linearized loose grouping of “suspect pleasures,” but it still seems reasonable to me that “suspect pleasures” is to be precisely that body of charges which is always to be the source of animation in every Ludovic Nemo painting, and which is also, maybe, coincident with what has also gone by the names of “allure” and “horse-dealers.”

So: That’s why there’s a duck fat mark in the very first of the Ludovic Nemo paintings. Later, other things can be done with duck fat, expanding on its latent charges: What are the flavors and perfumes stilled in it forever? What are the preformationist spirits, even? Of what spells is it the casting’s byproduct (dross, caput mortuum in a figurative sense)? These are yet more things that can charge a painting. Yet more horse-dealers, in a different hinterland of the mind-garret, for now visible only as figments in one of its two or three windows.

If they ran Ludovic down in Lipp, then the image of them in his apartment--the one in which he sits with his back to the armoire--is a premonition, a fear. To paint one’s fears, one’s dreams, is another source of animation for paintings, another allure. An analytic of the “wo es war” variety can generalize this thought to include all paintings: They are always the realization (& the manifestation, if they are shown) of some desire. This is one reason why a painting is always a dream, a reason located in its making. (A separate reason is located in the painting’s apperception, and it is the flicker between these two reasons, these two accounts of every painting’s dreamhood, that fascinated me in the past; now, I understand the flicker’s dynamic, and seek to fabbro-reinstate it, eventually.)

Soon, I will lose it. For now, I’ve got it. For now, it’s the utter discipline of keeping myself stupid enough to just do what I’ve said I’m going to do. Intoxication by means of lie.

My questions get stupider still. I want my canvases to be exaggeratedly vertical and verging on the talismanic, the totemic; but do I want that from the start, or do I want to start by repeating dimensions? I think I want the verticality from the start, but I don’t want to segment it, I don’t want to show that segmentation as a possibility yet, now do I want to do the low-hanging yet, not until there’s something, a little picture or just a little mark, at the bottom of the tall rectangle to lower all the way down to foot height (which is not, as I’ve said, to lower it all the way down to the floor; I want it hung low, but still on the wall, not propped against it).

There’s something I was going to say earlier but forgot to say and now it is not with the other things of like kind: That another “suspect pleasure” whose pull I feel fondly is that of the ontogenesis of “little guys,” most especially in forms relating to the original little fabric thing that Bella made for Daphne which I perhaps

remember so well because I stepped on a needle that night. Is it that there ought to be little guys (puppets, like Klee's; or like Elizabeth Englander's yoginis; or like Sayre Gomez's "Soldiers" which I learned about yesterday and which felt like the millionth iteration thereof but this very dryness could be capitalized-upon by reifying the type as-such) separate from the paintings? Or that the paintings themselves should be overcoded as little guys, e.g. by appending little feet and (and/or) maybe also little arms to them (and also by fine-tuning their dimensions, e.g. looking around for paintings whose dimensions feel "little guy"-like) (and also, perhaps most importantly, by carefully choosing their substrate: My first hunch is fleece and/or neoprene (in case of "and," fleece under, neoprene over-around the whole thing, not in segments))? I think the answer to both of these possibilities is "yes" and "yes"; but to a third possibility, that of depicting "little guys" as characters, the answer is "no" unless it is in conjunction with the animation-motion introduction, or toward a separate impulse I have which is to make certain lares-penates-type "little guys" inhabit painting space in a very precise way which seems to inaugurate an induction which flows outward into the space in which the painting is hung, conjuring such sprites / elves in the corners, in the rafters, on the edges of surfaces (table fairies), etc.
Adjacently related--but here I cut myself off so I don't break rigor for the bare sake of overwhelming affinity--this Lukas Quietzsch painting (Untitled, 2023, gouache on canvas, 100 × 110 cm) shows a quintessentialized "Little guy," also doubles him (also, that is, problematizes doubling), and also exemplarizes the becoming-painting of a "little guy" in one particular way--that is, by first doubling him and then making the pair into a figure on a moderately tightly bounding ground, filling the figure's space and the negative space with patternings alike in kind but not in character and each equally and uniformly alive with texture.

As an aside: I note that, short of raising the issue of the absurd mass of espresso-cup and re-Symbolism, it could be said that a short background or "context" (because Los Angeles does not provide this, and neither do my friends because I do not have any) can be conjured by listing the following documents: What Strau wrote in 2006; what Tatol wrote about Michael Krebber Catalogue Raisonné vol. I; what I wrote about Magnus Peterson Horner at the Gaylord; and--little talisman--what I wrote about Henry Belden's exhibition there and sent to John.
Is it some kind of self-defense mechanism that my own thought deploys against me, becoming intractably long any time I begin to feel I've gotten it into a good arrangement?
Here are transcriptions of notes I append to the above on a walk as the sun sets on the first evening of the year with the scent of honeysuckle and all other sweet things, the evening which every year cripples me with a wistful nostalgia that I can neither indulge

in nor identify.

I am exhausted, but I'm trying to name the rooms that I spoke of in my note today.

I think the first room is distinguished for having only the duck fat mark on every painting. The mark may be a little smudge in center-lower-center, or it may be a right triangle whose right angle coincides with the upper-right-hand corner, or (this will be in the case of all the other paintings besides these two) sort of vertical marks establishing the basic grammar of the armature. Marks made, ideally, with a plumb line, or at least with some kind of straight edge, and made with the duck fat having formed it with wax into some kind of a grease pencil. That's it for the markings on all the canvases in this first “room,” unless I say otherwise; and if I say otherwise, or if I have reason to think otherwise, then I think it ought to be just an abstracted Pontormo line. The presence of caput mortuum is a separate question, but it definitely needs to be somewhere in this room. Maybe on every painting. I think that, in all cases, the materials listed should just be oil and duck fat on [substrate; fill in, here, canvas, linen, neoprene, et cetera]. Gesso is often tacitly included if it is the primer, unstated in the materials list, and likewise with the wax that I will use as a varnish. I guess it must be that I resort to a press text to say that the only oil paint used on all of these canvases is a sort of caput mortuum residue from the Silicoil used in the painting of countless failed paintings, which is, materially, a broken or actively breaking suspension. As to dimensions and materials, pending retroactive contradiction, I think I should set up a combinatorial sort of n-dimensional Punnett square, and just keep the cells that look interesting to me--that is, pending below retroactive contradiction.

A room adjacent to this one maintains the wax-seal (central-lower-central) placement of the duck fat lump, and retains perhaps something of the materiality of the first room; but it has a whole world of imprints, solid, sigillographic imprints impressed into the lump: Ludovic’s signature, puttiphalli, et cetera.

I haven't saved much by this shortcut of playing back the audio of what I wrote above and making voice notes, trying to extract a structure or an order of operations or a recipe from my too-long mess. Which is to say, I'll have to go back and fill in all the details anyway. But at least my electric amanuensis will do more than half the typing for me.

So, here’s the room adjacent to the first one--the one which I was thinking of as the first room adjacent to the first one, and thinking of it as the one to the right of it, to the right and above in the little picture I drew. (But it's only the first adjacent room if you don't count, the one that houses the wax-seal-placement envelope paintings. Which, come to think of it, may as well be made on actual envelope. Why not have some so-called “works on paper”? Not that they'll be drawings or not-paintings. It'd be nice, and Mallarméan, to seal an empty envelope, and by the very act of its sealing, make the empty full--in the sense of an artwork’s fullness of meaning, a

Matisse’s fullness of force, life, lung-air (pulmonary tension). The sealed empty envelope makes me think of Schrödinger, too, whose flicker is also one of the most basic and most recurrent descriptions of the qualia of the flicker that gives aliveness to aesthetic objects.)

So if that's the mail room, below-adjacent by a couple floors, then in the first room next door, there is color-hallucination (but there's nothing supernatural, it’s just exegesis of what comes from the eye of color), which I initially described in terms of copies of black and white photographs of Cézanne paintings, but which I now think rather ought to begin with copies of Pontormo drawings and only afterward complicate itself on the theme of a black and white Cézanne which will helpfully sensitize many questions that are of concern for me, and which will be of more timely concern for me when I am really into the meat of the question of space for a painting, but for now, as I say, this is a way to get color straight out of a drawing copy after Pontormo, by bare means of attention. This, in retrospect, appears to me as the resolution of the problem I've really been faced with for the last several months: How to go from a drawing copying habit to a way of making paintings. Which also amounts to the problem of color (plus scale and placement within bounds). (I know I'm also eliding the problem of originality, as though it's not something of concern to me right now.) Anyway, it seems fitting that the answer to that question about color is that it was only a matter of opening my eyes to it in the right way, fitting that the right way here is as simple and literal-minded as anything that I’ve called by the name of Baudelaire-abstraction, acknowledgment of the real, realization of the imaginary, etc., a realism as simple as a choice, the function of fiction itself, attention being the only currency that needs to be spent here, really. And the valorization of caffeine later down the road (when? Maybe that needs to interlock sooner than I think).

Either in a room on the other side of this one (this first-right one with the iridescent color), or, in a way, inside this room, there is to be an acknowledgment that there is some matter of choice involved in how to mix colors that I see, not as raw and simple as “thrownness,” that I will have chosen by this point. And as a way to open things up as a corrective to the acknowledgment of that aspect of choice or arbitrariness, I think the answer is to make paintings off of all sorts of color-charges and cords that I see, and perhaps to conjugate the same thing with respect to all those different ways of setting up my color options and then using them to fill in the parts--to fill in, that is, realizations of the various colors that I see in the glint off of the graphite. (These seen colors, it can be noted, are really too pinprick-small to have much specificity of their own: they’re too glinting, too changing, to be as stable as I will have by this point held them to be.) By this point, will I be copying after other things in pencil or drawing my own espresso cups with pencil? I don't know yet; that is a matter to be decided by the interlock-intersection with other rooms.

The “other rooms,” then, the ones that follow the left hand branch,

might as well amount to a list of all the “suspect charges,” a list I gave above without much thought to the order, but I think I caught a glimpse of a good intersection between the two branches.

When I eventually do get to a Cézanne opening-up-of-space analytic on this right hand branch involving color (via the emergence of atmospheric perspective from out of the arbitrariness of the color selection--that's how I see it arising there on the right branch), here was my idea for how that will intersect with something from farther down the left branch. At some point on the left hand side, I will have done enough expanding into complicating of the armatures themselves, multiplying their verticals and giving them a little bit of depth and nearness by manipulating the ellipses’ dimensions, and nesting armatures within other armatures, I will have given good reason to suggest that a painting can be animated by the very same force that can make a swatch of plaid sufficiently visually interesting--on its very own account, perhaps even without any non-gray scale colors. So once I've arrived to a place where I can simply just play with plaid from an armature, from a pure armature angle, then I can merge the two arms, by putting plaid into rilieva. At that point the source of “visual interest” becomes completely different and has very little to do with the plaid itself, and, as Bella pointed out, has everything to do with the question of how to paint-denote both the three-dimensional structure of the fabric and the spatialized pattern on the fabric at the same time. The precedents, Chardin and Matisse, only afford a single glimpse apiece of the electric possibilities that are possible when these variables are made to play in counterpoint. It will be up to me to make good new paintings out of them.

Here’s a question that I think I need to resolve: Will there be restretching in the very first room? I think there will. But it won't encompass everything. It would be just one source of interest in these objects, and layering will be another one: Layering of gauze, layering of canvas, or layering of gesso until it is Rapson-thick. Restretching is its own kind of layering without building up material thickness, and it’s not something cheap and post-internet-y or simply paint-school Polke-core, like the layering of projected images one over the other (that's why I insist on my plumb line to realize the armatures and never a projector). So, with this other source of layering, this materially thin one made from restretching, here is the idea for how it will look in the very first room: I think it will be a matter of deriving visual interest from the incrementalized distortion of the verticals of not-necessarily-identical superposed armatures. (It should be identical in one case but not in another, let's say.) This will make a sense of vibration, or of expansion, that is true to the Matissean vision of pictorial interest as a matter of aliveness, fullness, pressure, flows, and flickers. Is it clear what I'm talking about? I'm talking about the restretching of neoprene, and the way in which more slack can be gotten after each restretching, and an earlier-drawn armature progressively bows outward by a margin that might follow some kind of exponential decay, the mathematics of which

are beside the point, because it's a practical application, not a Platonic realm of theory, and the theory only comes into play after the fact. For reasons of the mechanics of neoprene stretching, I think there should be at least a couple relatively large paintings in this first room. Maybe exactly too. Maybe they are my two large bars that I made. And the rest will be more Joseph Strau-sized, but thinner, and taller. And maybe one or two of them low to the ground. So now I have a pretty clear picture of what the first room looks like, And what values I will conjugate later in other rooms and will therefore need to hold constant or to refrain from rigorously in this first room (the left-hand-arm lists I was talking about). So, with that picture of the first room in my head--there's two large paintings with the changing armatures, restretched neoprene; and maybe a smaller neoprene work with restretching too, or a couple smaller ones; and other smaller paintings in vertical format, involving material layering; and all of the above involving duck fat and caput mortuum; and the press release, perhaps, providing the pretext for the memory, which is here rehearsed with consummately restricted means: I can already see a reason why I would like to consider the paintings in this room--it's embarrassing to say it out loud, but--I like that the theme is repetition, together with fiction and alchemy. I like that the only thing I started with was a love of the possibility of real successful alchemy by means of fiction, and what I got to organically, because of my long-standing sense that declensional and conjugational structures are the source of all caffeine in the world, or are at least the source of anything I'm capable of, the point that I got to is a pair of planes on which the same game of progressive repetition and change plays out. effectively throwing the most light on the repetition itself--which might be read (though not necessarily) as a trauma response specific to Ludovic Nemo's story, or as a trauma response specific to modernity, performed here in a way that can be read (though not necessarily) as a rehearsal that comments (by way of performance) on the inevitable pattern of recurrences that fills up contemporary art now, and that only succeeds in attaining aesthetic value, if it ever does so, in the same manner in which Mark Kokopeli and Magnus Peterson Horner succeeded: namely, by sheer dint of rigor and restraint.

There is a second list of suspect pleasures near the bottom, and then a bit past that list there's one more addition, about little guys. To the "little guys" one I want to add one more idea about them: That with the stitching and restretching (Monika Baer has done something similar to this but I think it's still worth doing) I can do something to pictorial space. A little guy can be made to be caught in a seam, crawling out of it. This feels kind of lame on its own. But I see it as contiguous with a number of other ways in which I want to make all space feel populated by such sprites. If it's in this context, I think it's a valuable strategy among several others.

In short, here is my working picture:

* In the first room, Ludovic's room with his back to the armoire; everywhere a duck fat mark and a caput mortuum wash and--I think--the Lipp floor, not really in "perspective" but just as a pattern and in a

worm’s-eye view, such that the armatures look like they’re stuttering to understand it. I said “The mark may be a little smudge in center-lower-center, or it may be a right triangle whose right angle coincides with the upper-right-hand corner, or (this will be in the case of all the other paintings besides these two) sort of vertical marks establishing the basic grammar of the armature. Marks made, ideally, with a plumb line, or at least with some kind of straight edge, and made with the duck fat, having formed it with wax into some kind of a grease pencil. That's it for the markings on all the canvases in this first “room,” unless I say otherwise; and if I say otherwise, or if I have reason to think otherwise, then I think it ought to be just an abstracted Pontormo line. The presence of caput mortuum is a separate question, but it definitely needs to be somewhere in this room. Maybe on every painting. I think that, in all cases, the materials listed should just be oil and duck fat on [substrate; fill in, here, canvas, linen, neoprene, et cetera]. Gesso is often tacitly included if it is the primer, unstated in the materials list, and likewise with the wax that I will use as a varnish. I guess it must be that I resort to a press text to say that the only oil paint used on all of these canvases is a sort of caput mortuum residue from the Silicoil used in the painting of countless failed paintings, which is, materially, a broken or actively breaking suspension. As to dimensions and materials, pending retroactive contradiction, I think I should set up a combinatorial sort of n-dimensional Punnett square, and just keep the cells that look interesting to me--that is, pending below retroactive contradiction.” And: “Here’s a question that I think I need to resolve: Will there be restretching in the very first room? I think there will. But it won't encompass everything. It would be just one source of interest in these objects, and layering will be another one: Layering of gauze, layering of canvas, or layering of gesso until it is Rapson-thick. Restretching is its own kind of layering without building up material thickness, and it’s not something cheap and post-internet-y or simply paint-school Polke-core, like the layering of projected images one over the other (that's why I insist on my plumb line to realize the armatures and never a projector). [THIS BRACKETED NOTE SHOULD REFER, I THINK, TO A SECOND ROOM: So, with this other source of layering, this materially thin one made from restretching, here is the idea for how it will look in the very first room: I think it will be a matter of deriving visual interest from the incrementalized distortion of the verticals of not-necessarily-identical superposed armatures. (It should be identical in one case but not in another, let's say.) This will make a sense of vibration, or of expansion, that is true to the Matissean vision of pictorial interest as a matter of aliveness, fullness, pressure, flows, and flickers. Is it clear what I'm talking about? I'm talking about the restretching of neoprene, and the way in which more slack can be gotten after each restretching, and an earlier-drawn armature progressively bows outward by a margin that might follow some kind of exponential decay, the mathematics of which are beside the point, because it's a practical application, not a Platonic realm of theory,

and the theory only comes into play after the fact. For reasons of the mechanics of neoprene stretching, I think there should be at least a couple relatively large paintings in this first room. Maybe exactly too. Maybe they are my two large bars that I made. And the rest will be more Joseph Strau-sized, but thinner, and taller. And maybe one or two of them low to the ground.] So now I have a pretty clear picture of what the first room looks like, And what values I will conjugate later in other rooms and will therefore need to hold constant or to refrain from rigorously in this first room (the left-hand-arm lists I was talking about). So, with that picture of the first room in my head--there's two large paintings with the changing armatures, restretched neoprene; and maybe a smaller neoprene work with restretching too, or a couple smaller ones; and other smaller paintings in vertical format, involving material layering; and all of the above involving duck fat and caput mortuum; and the press release, perhaps, providing the pretext for the memory, which is here rehearsed with consummately restricted means: I can already see a reason why I would like to consider the paintings in this room--it's embarrassing to say it out loud, but--I like that the theme is repetition, together with fiction and alchemy. I like that the only thing I started with was a love of the possibility of real successful alchemy by means of fiction, and what I got to organically, because of my long-standing sense that declensional and conjugational structures are the source of all caffeine in the world, or are at least the source of anything I'm capable of, the point that I got to is a pair of planes on which the same game of progressive repetition and change plays out. effectively throwing the most light on the repetition itself--which might be read (though not necessarily) as a trauma response specific to Ludovic Nemo’s story, or as a trauma response specific to modernity, performed here in a way that can be read (though not necessarily) as a rehearsal that comments (by way of performance) on the inevitable pattern of recurrences that fills up contemporary art now, and that only succeeds in attaining aesthetic value, if it ever does so, in the same manner in which Mark Kokopeli and Magnus Peterson Horner succeeded: namely, by sheer dint of rigor and restraint.”:

* Repetition as layering
    * Piling up of layers
        * Existing Paris-strip-glued totem
        * Gauze and plastic wrapping, conjugation as described above
    * Stitching together of materials
        * Vertical striping: This is weird but I think it would be good to have black and white vertical neoprene stripes in alternation; I think the wobbly uneven stretch would be nice
        * Horizontal striping
            * One with several relatively evenly sized bands
            * One where the top half (or more) is all one piece (of a different material? No, I don’t think so: I want it to be like that one Quietzsch painting) and the lower half is several bands of varying sizes
        * Can I make one whose fragment-stitching is derived, at

humorous sacrifice-cost, from the fragment-stitching in a fragment-stitching canvas of Theo's? Or of Quietzsch's?

* [MOVED TO "LEFT ARM, FIRST ROOM":] Repetition as superposition of armatures
    * Two large bars, the ones I built, stretched with neoprene, are part of this:
    * This also applies to some small bars too
* (In the mailroom underneath it:) "A room adjacent [subjacent] to the first one maintains the wax-seal (central-lower-central) placement of the duck fat lump, and retains perhaps something of the materiality of the first room; but it has a whole world of imprints, solid, sigillographic imprints impressed into the lump: Ludovic's signature, puttiphalli, et cetera." And: "the wax-seal-placement envelope paintings, come to think of it, may as well be made on actual envelope. Why not have some so-called "works on paper"? Not that they'll be drawings or not-paintings. It'd be nice, and Mallarméan, to seal an empty envelope, and by the very act of its sealing, make the empty full--in the sense of an artwork's fullness of meaning, a Matisse's fullness of force, life, lung-air (pulmonary tension). The sealed empty envelope makes me think of Schrödinger, too, whose flicker is also one of the most basic and most recurrent descriptions of the qualia of the flicker that gives aliveness to aesthetic objects."

Down the right-hand arm:

* A second room: "in the first room next door, there is color-hallucination (but there's nothing supernatural, it's just exegesis of what comes from the eye of color), which I initially described in terms of copies of black and white photographs of Cézanne paintings, but which I now think rather ought to begin with copies of Pontormo drawings and only afterward complicate itself on the theme of a black and white Cézanne which will helpfully sensitize many questions that are of concern for me, and which will be of more timely concern for me when I am really into the meat of the question of space for a painting, but for now, as I say, this is a way to get color straight out of a drawing copy after Pontormo, by bare means of attention. This, in retrospect, appears to me as the resolution of the problem I've really been faced with for the last several months: How to go from a drawing copying habit to a way of making paintings. Which also amounts to the problem of color (plus scale and placement within bounds). (I know I'm also eliding the problem of originality, as though it's not something of concern to me right now.) Anyway, it seems fitting that the answer to that question about color is that it was only a matter of opening my eyes to it in the right way, fitting that the right way here is as simple and literal-minded as anything that I've called by the name of Baudelaire-abstraction, acknowledgment of the real, realization of the imaginary, etc., a realism as simple as a choice, the function of fiction itself, attention being the only currency that needs to be spent here, really. And the valorization of caffeine later down the road (when? Maybe that needs to interlock

sooner than I think).”
* A second (?) in which “Either in a room on the other side of this one (this first-right one with the iridescent color), or, in a way, inside this room, there is to be an acknowledgment that there is some matter of choice involved in how to mix colors that I see, not as raw and simple as “thrownness,” that I will have chosen by this point. And as a way to open things up as a corrective to the acknowledgment of that aspect of choice or arbitrariness, I think the answer is to make paintings off of all sorts of color-charges and cords that I see, and perhaps to conjugate the same thing with respect to all those different ways of setting up my color options and then using them to fill in the parts--to fill in, that is, realizations of the various colors that I see in the glint off of the graphite. (These seen colors, it can be noted, are really too pinprick-small to have much specificity of their own: they’re too glinting, too changing, to be as stable as I will have by this point held them to be.) By this point, will I be copying after other things in pencil or drawing my own espresso cups with pencil? I don't know yet; that is a matter to be decided by the interlock-intersection with other rooms.”
* When I eventually do get to a Cézanne opening-up-of-space analytic on this right hand branch involving color (via the emergence of atmospheric perspective from out of the arbitrariness of the color selection--that's how I see it arising there on the right branch), here was my idea for how that will intersect with something from farther down the left branch. At some point on the left hand side, I will have done enough expanding into complicating of the armatures themselves, multiplying their verticals and giving them a little bit of depth and nearness by manipulating the ellipses’ dimensions, and nesting armatures within other armatures, I will have given good reason to suggest that a painting can be animated by the very same force that can make a swatch of plaid sufficiently visually interesting--on its very own account, perhaps even without any non-gray scale colors. So once I've arrived to a place where I can simply just play with plaid from an armature, from a pure armature angle, then I can merge the two arms, by putting plaid into rilieva. At that point the source of “visual interest” becomes completely different and has very little to do with the plaid itself, and, as Bella pointed out, has everything to do with the question of how to paint-denote both the three-dimensional structure of the fabric and the spatialized pattern on the fabric at the same time. The precedents, Chardin and Matisse, only afford a single glimpse apiece of the electric possibilities that are possible when these variables are made to play in counterpoint. It will be up to me to make good new paintings out of them.
Down the other arm, in interlocking parallel:
* * In the hinterland, which one by one intervenes to loop off as detours (local extrema) and also to interlock the several then-extant arms:
* There is a second list of suspect pleasures near the bottom, and then a bit past that list there’s one more addition, about little

guys. To the “little guys” one I want to add one more idea about them: That with the stitching and restretching (Monika Baer has done something similar to this but I think it's still worth doing) I can do something to pictorial space. A little guy can be made to be caught in a seam, crawling out of it. This feels kind of lame on its own. But I see it as contiguous with a number of other ways in which I want to make all space feel populated by such sprites. If it's in this context, I think it's a valuable strategy among several others

7 February 2025

Tatol review of Jutta Koether re-articulating (in yet another refracted form, refracted through a positive example) his vision of artistic quality, in a way that, if I delude myself a little, I can see in my latest “vision” / “plan” (heart breaks to use these crass words) above.

“Jutta Koether – 1982, 1983, 1984 – Galerie Buchholz – ***.5 This early work is very scrappy, even borderline crude and indistinct, and it isn't a high point of an artist's brilliant burst onto the scene but the great expectations of a promising artistic long game. They're interesting to see within the context of her later paintings, but aside from the one in the press materials and the relatively large one on a muddled cream background with an inscrutable composition of a black v-shape and three vertical lines (there's also a drawing of the same but upside down) they aren't particularly compelling. The press release emphasizes her relationship to the music magazine SPEX at the time, and the DIY countercultural context is clarifying. Approaching painting as an elemental, stripped-down procedure, like the "bare bones" of punk or folk music, making small paintings in her room, building her artistic sensibility from the ground up, operating off of little more than instinct and hard work. This sets the stage for a daunting task of artistic development, of laboring to find a way of making art when the tools haven't been handed to you. The threat of immediate success is hitting on a shallow trick and being shackled to that limited methodology forever; it's far better to take your time developing a mature approach to making art that enables perpetual depth of development and variation. …”

Emphasis mine.

8 February 2026

Disparate ideas, projections of directions that might lead outward from the faint first layout-map of my mind-garret:

In church I pictured the text of Ave Maria spelled out in a circle. The circle should, perhaps, have been a rotund specimen of ellipse, but the circle is after all a species of ellipse too. At a later point at which a Marian scaffolding will have already been introduced--by means, first, of the use of Pontormo's Visitation as the scaffold (happenstance objective-correlative) for the first complicatio of the armature as something involutable, recombinable, in a word baroquable, and after this first broaching of the Marian theme, its gradual filling out as, next, at this point I'm describing here, a tripling into Visitation-Magnificat-Ave, which is to say, a tripling by means of utterance-cataloguing, a tripling which colors Mary with cyclicality and speech-agency; afterward, I will remain forever frequently on the Marian theme, with its development resembling what I've hazily sketched twice, most recently involving hortus conclusus gardens (in one of my large sketch books), and earlier involving the troubadour-Sicilian line through the deep history of (transfigurative amour courtois etc.) lyric (in my "Carta" and elsewhere). By this point of tripling which I describe, also, text must have been introduced; I see this as having happened by means, first, of the signature and the signature's suspended activation as a compositional element (familiar from Grotjahn, but different for Ludovic), a corruption of the signature (Ludovic Nemo, Nemo, Ludovic, Ludo, Ludic Nemesis, a puttiphallic sign, Ludovicus, Ludocommodus vicus) which somehow begins to creep into a mantraic function (text unto texture, as with Hantaï's Ecriture rose but here proceeding by means graphically more akin to Lukas Quietzsch from out of Grotjahn's painterly signature-play). Then I'll be able to write an Ave around an ellipse (appearing as isolated from an armature, and subsequently multiplying in ways not seen before, ways marked by what was inherent to the Ave: Tenfoldness, fivefoldness of the tenfold, and so on).

I am impelled to imagine these mistily projected developments with a different picture, leaving the Longstreth-Hetzler model picture aside because of its spatial limits, trading it for a flow-tree more or less resembling my old "Carta," an arborescence not without subsequent re-fusions previously-divergent branches, an arborescence marked even more prevalently by sites of influence exerted magnetically (and mutually, if asymmetrically) among disparate sites / limbs / lobes (a dynamic which reminds me of the folding of a complicated peptide).

When the paintings get big their dimensions and baroque armature-structure ought to converge upon the structure of the high-Rhenish limewood altarpiece, and perhaps the materiality of this latter can (in a sort of backwash of flows, perhaps better imagined as countless simultaneous osmoses of which only one or a handful can be easily considered at a time but which in reality are really all always universally transpiring) percolate into my paintings whose wood supports, which will always have been there, can become scrubbed wood

like Shaker or Carinthian furnishings, limewood, limewood sealed with a rabbit skin concoction and perhaps polychromed but if so only in such a way as that very trace traces only will survive (a fixation upon patina as-such, shared by Michelangelo as Nagel pointed out and, according to Francisco, also all the Werner artists).

11 February 2026

Yesterday afternoon, driving to Chinatown for a delivery, I learned from Michael Krebber (in his ArtCenter talk about eight years ago) about Monsieur Teste, for him as important as des Esseintes as a defining type of the dandy. He said the discovery of Monsieur Teste was a revelation for him because he stripped Baudelaire and Huysmans's invention of its customary obsession with appearance, fashion, self-presentation. This was naturally of interest to me, as I would often be just as happy to set this dandy-aspect aside; sometimes I drag myself, or am dragged, through spells of interest in that kind of superficiality, but the shoe doesn't fit me too well.

I read-skimmed the novella, in French and in English, last night and this morning, and then read a recent review (by Benjamin Kunkel of N+1, in the New Yorker), thinking all this very dandyish (and licensed by Krebber himself, who jokishly described recently reading for the first time Melville's Pierre, which had long been one of his favorite books).

Before turning to the review my thoughts were these two, which are still the main ones:

First, that if in Teste Valéry offers a dandy-essence stripped of the inessential interest in his own image, my choice if given the chance to pare down Teste in his own turn would be to make him lose his affect of imperiousness. (It remains an open question whether it's of any use to adjust Teste in the zone of the way he comes off, when Teste himself positively avows that this territory is beyond his pale; open, too, the question of whether appearance-fixation was divorceable from the figure of the dandy in the first place.)

Second: vertigo in the sheer commensurability of Teste's endeavor with my own, my "notes" at large, and specifically my "re-Symbolism," "re-Formalism," my "Summa," in all its tangled aspirations to self-sufficiency, to case-study status, to restriction to its own terms even in these terms' own "tragic" (Mondrian) "thrownness" (Heidegger) or "contingency" (Mallarmé, Landy, & most others' term for the same). It's still completely opaque to me whether this so-called "project" of mine can ever be brought up to even what measure of legibility and self-cohesion Teste can claim. (The possibility is open, in any case, that seeking that showability would undermine the whole affair; I'm reminded of how Teste himself writes off any admiration of greatness as already compromised with inauthenticity by the fact of its being a

representation--the author/artist's representation of himself.)
In the meantime, I'll touch my finger to certain pulses where I am inclined to believe in my own project more than Teste's, and other pulses where I am eager to seamlessly graft his working bits (functions, flows, little discoveries) onto my own. All from Kunkel: I share something of the manner of Valéry's interest in a certain timelessness: "Valéry may glancingly acknowledge a phenomenon like the railway, but his lyric poetry and his sole novel-like excursion into prose, "The Evening with Monsieur Teste," exhibit very little interest in the mechanical paraphernalia and Edisonian impedimenta of modern times, or in the social conditions that accompany them."
Oh, here I am: "... the long mysterious periods in which Valéry—"the great poet who can hardly bring himself to write poetry, who can hardly even bring himself to explain why he cannot bring himself to write poetry"—published nothing at all. (In this case, a modernist aesthetic of silence concealed a private prolixity: the "Cahiers," some thirty thousand pages of entries in notebooks, kept over fifty years, which appeared in full only after Valéry's death.)" In this respect I consider my dandyism superior to Valéry's: The only thing better is a would-be great poet who can hardly bring himself to write poetry and who, therefore, actually doesn't.
But I suppose even Valéry's notes are more useful to others than mine, more mustered unto certain uses, less hobbled by an utter dependence on their own circular references, and not lapsing into the ghastly excruciation of boredom I found when recently I revisited my notes from January-February 2025, and was astonished by the snail-slow pace I managed to keep at that time.
I never muster moments of compelling legibility such as would make the following observation possible: "Among the major products of [the intention to work out "a System (in the physio-chemical sense)" that accurately reflected the conservation and transformation of those forms of energy known as thoughts] were Valéry's youthful essays on literary technique."
But I am, at least as much as he, interested in my work as tending toward--interested in pushing, always nudging, my thinking toward--such a system: Always gradually "[dispensing] with imprecision: vague words "like volition, memory, ideas, intelligence, time, etc., etc.!," might suffice for daily use, but the writer "must seek to find more subtle instruments."" His dispensing with them tried to be peremptory, but I think that's what landed him in an abstraction which, in the end, limits his project's usefulness. I try to defeat that sort of imprecision by means of long-term precision-by-degrees, progressively narrowing down the form of the prism-core of each idea by countlessly multiple exposures through their lenses.
It's useful that Valéry's post-Symbolist worldview is already very close to my own, in terms of its aesthetic ontology--in terms, I mean, of its account of the workings of poem-objects between minds. The view is basically Mallarmé's, and it's basically Pound's (Pound and Eliot got Mallarmé through Valéry); thus, it's mostly contiguous with my own, that I've scaffolded so far as possible upon the same frame.

Teste is mistrustful of “even the rather precise work of poetry,” even if he hesitates to throw it out along with everything else; I, likewise, am at least provisionally mistrustful of everything but painting, and even painting is held always on a certain kind of trial, its status made always to flicker, subject always to tests and pressures. All this does is to situate me in an extremely broad and diverse conversations that includes such mutually incommunicating (not to say incommunicable) projects as Hantaï’s and Joselit’s, Bois’s and Krebber’s, Graw’s and Grotjahn’s. (Polke and Warhol coagulate as durationally-constituted centers of this broadest-cast territory; but I insist that Hantaï is more relevant than he seems, even a third leg (ha ha) that their stool topples without.)

I found an Hantaï shibboleth, “crible machinal,” in Monsieur Teste; I couldn’t remember a mention of Valéry between Hantaï and his many interlocutors. In any case, I’d say that Hantaï stands for the sort of humility and patience that I find lacking in the Teste project. Teste is “not yet low enough” (and in feeling this sentence come to my mind, I’m made also to wonder how contiguous Beckett is with Valéry, and what shunting separates my route out of Valéry from his, or whether any does at all).

Here I see unqualifiedly much of myself: Teste “compels “the use, if not the creation, of a forced language, sometimes one that is vigorously abstract.” Teste, dispassionately interested in himself simply as the human subject most available to his investigations, studies his soul as a mathematical combinatory of possibilities. Obsessive speculation on what a person such as himself might feel or do meanwhile entails that Teste feels and does very little. He speaks, Valéry’s narrator notes, in “muted” tones and makes only “sober” gestures.”

This is unbearably poignant to me (I say with dry eyes): “‘I confess I have made an idol of my mind, but I have found no other.’ This means that Teste consecrates himself to a basically hypothetical existence. Even his thoughts are not so much thoughts as they are notions about possible ideas.” But besides weeping for myself, I’m thinking of John Kelsey’s piece about Michael Krebber (of which Krebber himself was very fond), and in particular its theme of the relation between possibility and actuality. As far as this relation goes--seen not as a polarity but as an intricate, musical matter, in the vein of Bergson and Heidegger--this is where I feel closest to Krebber and to Kelsey. See, for example, “When Krebber hangs the readymade horse upside down, we might note that he repeats Baselitz, for example, but the important thing is that this repetition renews the possibility of Baselitz in the present moment, and thus also that of Krebber, stuck as he is. Such an “emptying appropriation” not only captures and claims the stolen gesture or image, it makes it return with a difference. Repetition, as Giorgio Agamben has said regarding both messianic history and cinematic montage, is a strategy of renewing the possibility of what was (“that which is impossible by definition, the past”), of disassociating an identity from its proper place in order to produce a transformation.”

Fear of fears--that someone could write something like this of my “espresso cup” (if I ever figure out how to write it, or how to do anything else with anything in these “notes”): ““Monsieur Teste” is certainly not a novel or novella in the ordinary sense; it’s more like a lightly fictionalized intellectual diary.”

Kunkel sketches Teste’s lineage, which is not nearly linear enough to be a useful continuation of the rigorous and systematic (at least earnest and deliberate) aspect of Valéry’s work, but which, anyway, arcs across the dearest stars in my sky: “if “Teste” seems to have been the first book of its kind, it was hardly the last. In 1902, Hugo von Hofmannsthal produced his “Lord Chandos Letter,” in which a fictional seventeenth-century aristocrat confesses to Teste-like doubts about the adequacy of language to convey experience. In 1910, Valéry’s friend Rainer Maria Rilke published “The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge,” first called “The Journal of My Other Self” and narrated not by Rilke but by his alter ego Brigge. Fernando Pessoa’s posthumous “Book of Disquiet,” composed from the nineteen-tens to the thirties, also comes to mind: a thick sheaf of philosophical and psychological fragments ascribed to Pessoa’s stand-in Bernardo Soares. Like Valéry, the writers of these extraordinary works of prose were poets. In each case, the fractional difference between the writer’s actual self and his alter ego seems to have given him license not so much to confess [I’ve said the same thing in response to a preemptive doubts about how it will read when I impose the claim to “autobiography” upon such narrative- and persona-voided paintings as I conceive] (these are not salacious or even, really, very personal books) as to think and feel as he otherwise could not, as if it were impossible to say what was happening inside oneself if one’s official self were the place where such things had to happen.”

“Valéry’s “Teste” did not inaugurate a new branch of literature along the lines he had laid out. The prolonged, preliminary thought of a scientific literature of pure possibility evaporated as soon as it hit the ground. The technical psychiatry and neurobiology of later times necessarily lacked Valéry’s poetry, and the poets themselves could never make good on his scientism without ceasing to write poetry.”

Maybe I can. I’m no poet.

““The Steps,” in which the poet hears the footfalls of a lover as she approaches with a kiss. Its final stanza suggests, in hesitant octameters, a sort of key to Valéry’s infatuated aloofness from experience:

Don’t rush that act of tenderness,
        Sweetness of being and not being,
        For I have lived in expectation,
        My beating heart became your steps.

The translation is by Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody, from “The Idea of Perfection” (2020), an excellent selection from Valéry’s poetry and notebooks. And the lines illustrate how much of the sweetness of being is, for Valéry, the simultaneous sweetness of not being—how far the anticipation of life goes toward constituting life’s actual incarnation.” How far, in other words more my own, the redemption of

life transpires from out of imagination of itself, from within itself, inhering in the very vibration or flickering that is the dimension of "doubling" always involved in any imagination, any fiction, marked always by a certain empreinte indexically linking world and thought (here I generalize Mallarmé's concept of empreinte outward from its original application to the act of writing a poem; it applies, more broadly, to all acts of fiction, which is to say, to all acts of art, all acts of imagination, all moments of living as personal beings with minds).

Here, I am reminded of the deepest & most valuable insight from a talk given by Isabelle Graw (at the Jewish Museum, from her then-in-progress book Love of Painting; I was listening to this, too, in anticipation of yesterday evening's shameful sham of a conversation between her and Sterling Ruby, who, as it turns out, has absolutely nothing going on upstairs), wherein she observes the general validity of the law that the more rigorously the artist arranges to remove himself from the painting, the more the painting itself becomes invested by his personal aura (she doesn't use this term; she calls it the illusion of the artist's presence, or something). She cites Warhol, Polke, Richter, Guyton; I am left wondering about the extension of this analytic to Krebber and von Bonin, Strau and on to Micheala Eichwald or Mathieu Malouf and whoever else I care most about now. Anyway here's the parallel in Teste: "The ultimate effect is paradoxical: the more that Valéry eliminates the ghost of pain and passion from the logical machinery of his work, the starker and more affecting the moans and cries of the ghost become. It may not be a general law of literature that the writer will end up emphasizing the strong emotions inside his or her work precisely to the extent that he or she tries to eliminate them—but Valéry the would-be scientist would probably appreciate any research into the phenomenon's wider application."

Kunkel finally lands on a point at which it becomes more clear than ever that Hantaï is the missing link. "In a last fragment, the eponymous researcher of himself speaks of "syllogisms impaired by agony, thousands of images bathed in pain, fear mingled with lovely moments from the past." Agony, pain, fear:these are the inexpungable residue of Teste's probabilistic exercises, an indivisible remainder that carries over from one calculation to the next—and perhaps the motivation for engaging in such desperately abstract exercises in the first place. … For all that he vaunts his taste for precision, Valéry's most eloquent word is surely [in "The Cemetery by the Sea"] this stammering it, it, it." Wo es war, soll ich werden: Freud stated it once, without sufficient ground but, despite himself, dead right. Heidegger was perhaps a step closer to self-justification in his restatement of the role of contingency, treated by him under the name "thrownness." Now here I am, trying to pick up where they and choice others have left it off, unconvinced of the effectiveness of my chosen means, this comically intractable case study, these notes.

It's now 10:26 a.m.; my notes on Teste, unplanned, took more than two hours; I meant to start my day by making a fuller note of how John Kelsey makes contact, in his piece on Cosima von Bonin, with Strau's own vision of dandyism, and how this alignment sits perfectly with my little ecstatic vision of freedom such as I glimpsed it in Duchamp and Godard.

But first, before it gets any too-later, I want to try to write down the way things seemed so clear and expansive and perfect and good to me last night, when I was swimming in those bits of Monsieur Teste after bathing in Krebber for a day (and also a week).

But--and maddeningly--I cannot; I feel exhausted, even by the comically small feat of considering glancing considerations of a short book I've barely read. I eat, a scrumptious honey yogurt with dates and hazelnuts and Turkish apricots and Brazil nuts and cinnamon and salt, and afterward my little espresso in my favorite cup, and I become scattered and empty, I begin to twitch and to itch and to wonder whether there is something wrong with me not just personally but chemically, whether I have if not brain cancer then at least the bad kind of autism.

I can't remember what was in my head last night. I think I might have been feeling good, as I still half-heartedly do (but staking everything on it!), about the presence of fiction--the barest shade of it--I mean the Ludovic Nemo--at the core of my paintings, such as I conceive them (not that they are anything solid enough to have a core, not that they are Cézanne apples, but anyway as facets of a prismatic vision (which is trivially true of any art-object constitutable as such by sole means of a gaze, and is therefore to make no presumptuous claim for them) there is something which they gather around--do I make myself clear?--they render real (by repetitioned Baudelaire-abstraction) a self, their painter, a sensibility marking a little maker, the concerns held in common from one canvas to the next).

Feeling good about the idea of the fiction there as such, feeling that it was a nice idea and good for paintings and even good for painting, to have paintings with this idea. Feeling good, too, outside of the baseball, because it crossed my mind that this fiction, in a nice (what mathematicians call "elegant," pointing to the same quality that makes an object like Johns's flag and Warhol's Marilyn a nice object, just the right object, highly determined with no noticeable remainder of any quality in excess) little way, added Strau to my Krebber. This almost made me smile. And then I got really worked up when, late in his talk (this was eight years ago, I think; it's worth pointing out again how outdated I am), Krebber expressed a sort of a belief in fiction as a way forward, as a way forward for art, but set it aside for younger people.

I like how wispy is my story of Ludovic Nemo and the horse dealers at Brasserie Lipp. There's almost ("almost") no story there at

all--and so it may even be bare enough to fit well into paintings.

Am I out of date? It nags me, because I don't hear much chatter of Krebber and Strau in Los Angeles in 2025 (the year I'm still living in, having fallen into a morne and ugly muteness and non-function at least since falling into the rhythm of my job), let alone 2026. For signs of life in this vein I grasp--notably, disappointingly, often outside of Los Angeles--toward Mitchell Kehe, Harry Davies, Enzo Shalom, Micheala Eichwald, Magnus Peterson Horner. Signs of life are in easier reach if I let myself count Cosima von Bonin and Jutta Koether, but do I? I feel admiration, but not quite enough closeness, to feel bolstered by what I see as good in them. But here is the real "fiction" to my paintings (such as I conceive them) ("real": As though its any different from the "other" fiction, let alone anything "good" by comparison to it, let alone anything positively good). It's the way I stage little progressions, developments, iterations, zoomings-in and doublings-back for Ludovic Nemo, and thereby "fict" his autobiography (in fabricating what I am calling his autobiography). I mean the way in which I think, in countless passes and overpasses, of the "first room" in this Longstreth-Hetzler model, pacing back and forth over it until it accrues the patina I'm waiting for (the patina which alone gives me the permission to sign off on it, patina the sole gatekeeper of quality, but this is a digression). And even more when I talk over and over again about rooms beyond (and rooms beyond rooms beyond) this "first room," relying constantly upon this glimpses around the corners around the corner to ever-so-gradually gain more body for the paintings in the first room itself and, perhaps even more functionally importantly, to gain more confidence for the eventual fruitfulness (or the fructive eventuality, which, like aura or presence or aliveness in Graw's reading, is actually a quality which can inhere in paintings themselves, and which is the quality upon whose presence in this first room's paintings everything depends) of the ones ("ones" as though more than one painting could ever be painted at once) at hand.

Patina, modulation, pacing, exquisitely determined facture: It is only by doubling the author that these paintings become more than what they are, only thereby that they become paintings, only thereby attain the requisite aliveness. It all depends on the doubling of the authorship, the same that Duchamp effected with the readymade, the same that Hantaï effected when he acknowledged the agency of the canvas itself and made the canvas paint the pattern (the figure, the gestalt, the painting), the same double-agent authorship of any baker and--I add this new one--any kidney stone (really a perfect image, with its patina and its crystallinity and its excrescency). And so I insist, it is not just I but also Ludovic Nemo who made these paintings (and it is not just Ludovic but also Nemo, and Ludovic Nemo is not just my döppelganger but also my new invention, and he is not just a new invention but also a century-old invention, and he is not just an invention but also a historical readymade, and even more particularly he is not just my double but also Bernard's double, and so forth). For these paintings it's necessary that the doubling be

fractal--or, more precisely and less kitschily, inductive--or else the structure collapses back into simplicity.

In grasping too tightly onto my desire to be Teste-systematic, Teste-precise, Teste-simple, Teste-avowable, maybe I've gone up a creek. Take this story then. Last night I gasped, felt indicted, when I read Michaela Eichwald's reposting (on her blog Uhutrust, in automatic translation) of the following fragment of Sean Tatol's post on Francis Picabia and Rosemarie Trockel: "No artist knows precisely what they're doing because artistic decisions are imprecise and instinctual, driven by a prelinguistic impulse that's present in all but the laziest and most cynically instrumentalized artworks." I, the laziest and most cynically instrumentalized! But I don't think so, really, because the prelinguistic comes through, wriggles through, really, bit by bit, in proceeding through the making of the paintings pass by pass, in the manner of patination (or ironing, or the transformation du boulanger, or the marche du crabe). And anyway the artist who knows precisely what he's doing--in this case, my bodily self after I and my fictional double have undecidably-collaboratively worked the paintings into figmental reality beforehand--is not really the whole story, and is not quite perfectly half of it either. Of course bullshit can be called right here, but that call itself is well within the scope of the little game I'm bearing forth here. Oh, I feel giddy, I feel like Jack Bankowsky talking about Krebber, I feel like Joshua Landy talking about Mallarmé. But no exclamation point on the preceding sentence, for two reasons: I lose everything if I pop this almost-irony into irony, for one, and for another it's all still just too poignant, in both cases because it's still just me talking about myself in terms that are not yet real, in shifter-terms that are still hanging, floating, having yet no real object-referent. Do the terms survive the making of the paintings?

The making of the paintings! For the first time I have canvases--No, I have bars. To have a stack of paintings! This skeletal stack is the closest I've ever come and I'm positively elated. And besides I quite like them, these little things I built, I like their homely little joints and their sharpness and their thinness (I recall Jack Bankowsky: "wafer-thin" he called his canvases in 2015), I like their dimensions sourced from a little group of Strau's tin paintings, I like that completely delightfully shallow act of lifting, I like the fact that I'm going to do it again, if I can squirrel some longer pieces of wood, with the very same Krebber paintings Jack was talking about ("almost (this is important!) same-size canvases"), and my little group will be as many as I want at 200 x 150.2 cm and one more (sealing the group) at 220 x 169.9 cm. A little stack of paintings, and this is what it's all about, and my stack has in it no paintings, and this is what it's all about.

Who in Los Angeles has a stomach for joke-modernism now? The only galleries scrappy enough for anything as self-consciously failure-bound as this are too laser-focused on their own hopelessly idiosyncratic vision of scrappiness that I have nothing to contribute to. And just here is the problem of address, of community, of reference, which Krebber bumped into at the precise moment when he painted his blog paintings. No, I don't think that "networks" is the answer for this (long-historied) problem. Not that it's signed and sealed, but I really do believe, in its place, in my idea of narrative, of fiction. It's essentially Mallarmé's own idea, the same fiction that was presented so clearly in his "Autre éventail (pour Mlle. Mallarmé)"; in my paintings just as in his poems, everything depends on the ability of work itself to provide all the requisite ingredients, the poems to form (didactic? Educational? Only qualifiedly) their own audience, the paintings to smuggle in all their own relevant background. And so I start with duck fat and the Lipp floor, and all the music inheres in the development.

Certain things stick and cause me recurrent discomfort. For at least a year humor is one of them. I always feel self-conscious that everything I touch is drained of humor, whereas everything that works seems in some way animated by humor; that's obvious in Strau and Krebber, but it's also what separates Grotjahn from Ruby, and it's also the golden thread along which are also strung von Bonin and Polke and Kippenberger and Broodthaers and Picabia and Duchamp and even Manet when at the pinnacle of his dandy-consciousness he painted the lion-hunter (no one knows it; it's in São Paulo).

On plaid I have yet more thoughts. I think the way it can work for me is by first carrying forth the armatures into such an expansive and intricated dazzle that it is no surprise when at large scale they can even give an effect of plaid--and when they do so there is perceptible a wink to Krebber and to Trockel and to Polke (or, to Krebber's performatively-failing repetition of Polke and Trockel); because of the state of overcoding, I would destroy the wink by overtly including a readymade plaid textile as a primary component of a painting's composition as that painting's support--and yet I still need to sensitize the reference, and so I will do so by making a painting on a readymade plaid support but only on condition that the entire face be primed so that the plaid is present only in an up-close profile view, present only on a plane as rarefied as the one Sarah Rapson always works on: Only thus can the wink really be a wink, that is, only thus can it really have the requisite inframincité (every wink must be

lighter than air; my paintings, because of the way their doubling fiction is necessarily constructed and poised, can only succeed if they retain this perpetual vanishing flicker). (Or, and maybe also, a second wink in the same exhibition of large paintings becoming plaid: One painting's substrate can be made of stitchings together, perhaps just two very large nearly-halves of the whole canvas with a horizontal seam near the painting's center, except that either the lower left or lower right corner of the top half, or the upper left or upper right corner of the bottom half, or, for that matter, just any one of the corners of a whole canvas not composed of two stitched halves, can be replaced with a tiny--a few inches to a side--fragment of a plaid fabric like my pajama pants that I recently tore, stitched in to the substrate-composite as a second or third tectonic plate (not stitched-on: It has to be coplanar with the rest of the substrate).)

Well then. One in the afternoon and I've done nothing but typewrite.

Three hours of putzing around later, neither leaving the room nor heating up skin glue on the stove nor even thinking about my "rooms," here's one more thing I was going to say.

It's nice for Krebber and Strau that they can use a working manner of waiting with a completely blank "beginner's mind" until the very last moment before a show, then throwing it all together under time pressure. But this is utterly unavailable to me because you can't get a show scheduled without having had one in the first place. Nor can I use Cosima von Bonin's strategy (bartend at the Kippenberger Trockel & co. club, and tell everyone to start referring to you as "the artist Cosima von Bonin"); another important thing about me (to be noted right off the bat in the account of my "case study") is that I have no art friends (barely have anyone at all with whom to indulge my effervescent love of beer. I'm wearing my "HARP LAGER" shirt today, for example, and have not laid eyes on a living soul since Bella went out the door for work).

This is not by way of complaint, but rather to render more specific and particular the problem whose address my case study is to be. It's actually a more interesting problem than either Krebber's or von Bonin's, in my opinion. Has more to do with everyone.

This is where the self-contained aspect of the fiction comes in, the Mallarméan way of smuggling all the necessary cargo into the work itself. The much-doubted dream of providing all the equipment for its own reading. A horizon perhaps not to be grasped but at least to be approached a step or two closer than the current benchmarks.

On dandyism and freedom and the utopian kernel that is to be learned from Cologne and tried again:
From John Kelsey, "Cosima von Bonin" (ca. 2008):

"Some say that what keeps von Bonin's story interesting is

precisely the fact that she is not and never has been a real artist, so every move she makes risks betraying her original (creative) imposture."

"All her themes—the self-historicizing of a community that both includes and excludes, indoctrination and discipline, role-playing and rank, the performance of success and failure, etc."

"The local history that includes von Bonin is also the story of an art world performing itself with a vengeance, and because of the extent to which her works remain embedded in a collective reappropriation of context via the ruses of fiction."

"Like the twin hull of the catamaran and the set's divided rooms, the "two positions" in the work's title might signal von Bonin's strategically ambivalent relationship to the programmed trajectory of an artist's career. She is still part nonartist."

"Even though the collective and critical ethic of '90s Cologne is now performed as an ironically romanticized and melancholic ritual—part fashion show, part music video, and part training camp—it persists nonetheless, acting out the hope of surviving its own perversion in the present."

"In "The Non-productive Attitude," a text written on the occasion of the group exhibition "Make Your Own Life: Artists In and Out of Cologne" (which was organized by Bennett Simpson at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 2006 and included von Bonin), Josef Strau writes of the uneasy "fusion of glam and politics" in a context where critical strategies were often inflected by ambition and envy."

So, from Strau, "The Non-productive attitude":

"It was maybe a kind of transformed fetishism attitude to live the social life of an artist without actually producing any art, or at least without presenting any art. On the one hand, the motives of this attitude could have been simple fear of representation; but on the other, they could have announced a desire to practice in a radical consequence what many theories suggested by the death an author-or producer-subjectivity. Certainly this pose of anti-production in the period of the late eighties, which for sure was already inspiring nineties art fashion, was a self-transforming attitude– even as its strong background of theoretical and radicalist conceptual art considerations were criticized by some as a bourgeois attitude of well-fed men. The substitution of the artist-as-producer with the sheer behavior of the artist-bohemian was a reaction to the work values of the eighties and necessitated a very dense social field in which to act out its partly theatrical impulse."

"When I moved there in the mid- to late eighties, I was very quickly assured by my first impressions that at least some parts of Cologne would allow me some time to survive and to become an artist who did not actually produce anything, did not have much to show and did not even feel the need to fulfill social life in any exciting way. There was a new necessity to practice a separation between the meaning of the artist's social participation and the representation of his production, in order to dissolve its old organic unity by creating

another kind of social recognition- and in the best case to unnerve the repressive demands for legitimation."

"In short, the popularity of anti-productive attitudes in Cologne was maybe a result of some iconoclastic tendency, the sympathy for an attitude which substitutes image qualities with narrative impulse. In the best years the non-productive artist got great recognition if he substituted his work for a good personal narrative.
He could be a kind of island in the main art world, while securing continuity with the tradition of anti-visual heresies."

"Most of the time [at Friesenwall] we pretended to show "models" for a space instead of actual work within the space."

15 February 2026

I am dreaming of the biggest paintings I will ever make, not comically big like the Norton Simon's Frankenthaler or today's megagallery slop, but quite large paintings nevertheless; and I am dreaming of these things, maybe measuring seven feet tall by eleven wide, say, as exerting an emptiness as their chief quality. An emptiness whole-made, of course, made necessary by the painting's intricate (even while achingly minimal) inherent structure, and redeemed in the very same way in which any manifestation of contingency is redeemed (in Mallarmé's poetics). Morris Louis's curtains strove for the kind of exultant emptiness I'm speaking of, but they didn't get as close to transcendence as, say, certain much smaller paintings by Michael Krebber. On this particular score, both Hantaï and Matisse do not quite make sense at this scale, do not quite connect with what I am trying to speak into existence. A monumental painting is something different from a tableau. The Barnes mural, the CAPC unstretched canvases, the Tabulas lilas laid unstretched on the ground: These leave me to some extent unsatisfied, in the manner in which they retain, now in a vestigial mode, the organs which had given consummate realization to the Matissean full-to-bursting aliveness of active, tensed expansion.

17 February 2026

Paul Sietsema happened to sit down in the seat directly next to mine in the ArtCenter talk (the panel on art writing). Completely

unprompted, he told me he'd love to see my work. I demurred. He gave me his email for the occasion of my eventual change of heart: paulsietsema@gmail.com.

18 February 2026

Material for an exhibition, a first one, "the first room," The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo or The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo, I (I like the double entendre but I don't think it's legible enough) or The Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo, vol. I (I don't like how it sounds like a movie or a video game).
Idea about drawings in 2 or three groups: First, a vertical column of drawings, like to suggest progressive development, like to provide a transparent window into the palingenesis of the armature-form which is repeated in every painting; these are to be framed with clear PVC, in the manner of Julia Yerger's drawings at Château Shatto (which--maddening!--are not photographed in these frames in the gallery's documentation, nor did I happen to take pictures of them myself), in the following order from Left to Right or from Bottom to Top:

Then, separately, a bundle of drawings off to the side, the drawings I made of Fennec at the same time that I was coming up with the armature; these are to be framed and hung individually, like as-drawings, I don’t know how specifically; like to suggest sincerity, like to suggest a certain range of means by triangulating from a distant second point.

There persists a question: Whether or not to include the following drawings, as a third group, indicating (but is this even legible?) a notion of formalization (armature-development) of the baby “as” the “little guys.”

Collectively these two sets of drawings stage the fable of where the paintings come from; this is perhaps extraneous or redundant or too much—this perhaps violates the “inframince” operating principle—but right now I have the feeling that to do less would be too little. And then there are the paintings, and that’s it. But not quite: There’s the “press release,” and maybe there’s something else besides, some little trinket or poster or postcard or invitation?

The “press release”:

I. Fable
i) Some quote pertaining to “Fable” from Novalis (the psychedelically allegorical section of Heinrich von Ofterdingen) “‘Grant me,’ said the Moon, ‘the Kingdom of the Fates, whose wondrous mansions have arisen from the earth, even in the court of the palace. I will delight you therein with spectacles, in which the little Fable will assist me.’ / … Fable and history sustain to each other the most intimate relations, through paths the most intricate, and disguises the most extraordinary.” Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen [Perhaps I append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation]
ii) Quote from Marc Kokopeli’s press statement from Tales of the veil (to overshoot a second time, in an opposite direction; these first two are red herrings, then): “These Post-Baroque stylings inform the exhibition with questions about the circularity of references to the fable of becoming an artist.” Mark Kokopeli, “Tales of the Veil” [Perhaps I append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation, too]
iii) Something from Puberty in painting (do I cringe and collapse? Do I lose everything in overstating reference, saying too much?): “... one knows that everyone has a different understanding of this concept [that of painting], and that even this very understanding is duplicated and movable within its own parameters. ... If I call all this a stage situation, then the ghosts won't necessarily have to scare me anymore. I will have to become active though.” Michael Krebber, “Puberty in Painting” [Perhaps I do not append “(Red herring)” at the end of this quotation; I love the charge that its absence inaugurates, coinciding perfectly with the Krebber invocation; it is so hilarious as to even be glamorous, to me.]

II. Topos (or: II. Theme)
(So, what I am doing is laying out the conditions for fiction, roughly)
(Stated as a sort of “scénario”: in one or two sentences, generate the premise of the duck fat and the re-stretching, or more specifically the specific supplement which the armature-etiology afforded by the “revelatory sketches” does not already account for. I’m talking about the parquet or tile at Lipp, the horse dealers, and so on, the

fixation attributed to Ludovic which compels the repetition.

III. Mechanism (or, perhaps better, “III. Motion”) (options declined for their too-much valence: kinesis, dynamism, vibration, activation, animation, electrification, hocus pocus, expansion, elaboration, development, induction)
Repetition, oscillation, vibration; variation, conjugation, bifurcation, recombination; revisitation, counterpoint, zoom-in, capitulation, stasis, bloom, apotheosis; digestion, fermentation, lamination, accumulation, compost; clearing, breath, refreshing, fiction.

Footer: Three “artist bio” sections, playing with the common typesetting practice of having slightly wider margins for the text body (the press release text) than for the footer (the artist bio / CV), as not quite seen here:

So, in my case, slightly wider than the body, an artist bio for Ludovic Nemo, with my birth date; then, immediately below with the same typesetting, another almost exactly repeated artist bio for Ludovic Nemo, with Bernard’s LN’s birth date / CV; then a third one, for myself, with slightly narrower margins (so a footer to the footer, slightly wider still), almost exactly matching the first Ludovic Nemo’s bio, but with my name. As follows:

… Repetition, oscillation, vibration; variation, conjugation, bifurcation, recombination; revisitation, counterpoint, zoom-in, capitulation, stasis, bloom, apotheosis; digestion, fermentation, lamination, accumulation, compost; clearing, breath, refreshing, fiction.
Ludovic Nemo (b. 2001, Arlington, Texas, United States) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had no one-person exhibitions. His work has not been included in any group shows.
Ludovic Nemo (b. 1868, Sint-Martens-Latem, East Flanders, Kingdom of Belgium) ostensibly lives and works in Paris. His work has only been included in the Volpini Exhibition, held at the Café des Arts on the occasion of the 1889 Exposition universelle.
Tom Worth (b. 2001, Arlington, Texas, United States) lives and works in Los Angeles. He has had no one-person exhibitions. His work has not been included in any group shows.

It is already past the hour at which I was to drive to the Getty to consult the oracles in the GRI (artist books of Krebber Strau Koether von Bonin and whomever I forgot).

The ending of a short-ish Yve-Alain Bois Artforum article on Matisse's sculpture:

"We have now arrived at the true juncture where Matisse's sculpture and painting meet– or rather, where the parallelism to which the artist alluded resides. This has nothing to do with the appearance of his sculptures in his paintings or the game of identifying shared figures and poses among them. Instead, the common goal of his best work in both domains is, to my mind, that of deflecting cognition, of preventing us from forming any kind of Gestaltist synthesis. I've written extensively on this aspect of Matisse's painting, so I shall be synoptic here. Between Le Bonheur de Vivre and his (failed) encounter with Cubism in 1913–16, Matisse elaborates two pictorial strategies to derail our gaze, to make us lost: either excess of color saturation and size, or "decorative" excess that compels us to look at everything at once, so that we are forced to rely on our peripheral vision and lose control over the field of the canvas. Neither kind of excess is involved in Matisse's sculpture. However, the will to blind us remains—blinding in the sense of preventing us from mastering the work we behold, from having a clear and consistent view of it as something we can ever fully grasp."

I get the sense--but maybe only halfway--that he is trying to turn Matisse into a Picasso or a Picabia, in the same way he tried to do that to Mondrian. Namely that he is trying to make Matisse and Mondrian out to have subconsciously, even against their every intention, carried out the same inexorable process that Picasso and Picabia zealously embraced: Total destruction, proceeding dialectically and therefore ever more fully all the length of their career. I've also felt, for years, that the Picasso-Picabia project of destruction is an admirable process, lending a sense of the sublime which is in that way properly aesthetic, but that it is somehow off to the side of the endeavor that I more closely identify with. The latter is the making of good paintings, and Matisse and Mondrian are its twin chief patron saints (I said as much ca. nine months ago, when last summer I consciously elevated them to the status of dual exemplars for my craft, alongside whom there can be no other so great; so I said, and so the system collapsed, slowly and then completely and then into the winter with dying rattles).

Now I don't see these projects as two opposite sides of a coin anymore. I think all good art involves negation to some extent. And I

don’t think that the delectation of the most destructive Picabia is categorically different from that of the most classically balanced and harmonious Matisse. The field is more complicated than either of those two mutually-exclusive conceptions yet comprehended.

19 February 2026

I'm absolutely floored by having taken Hegel’s Phenomenology of spirit from the top for the first time. I'll try to take several passes at what I'm trying delicately to hold in my head right now.
First, that it’s just a sense, just the barest and most possible sense: I’ve only been through the preface, and not quite all of it. But I’ve found something important already.
Second, it’s that I had delicious peanut sesame noodles, with half a bottle of Beaujolais, and then I felt capable of such a beautiful state of mind. Then I knew that I wanted a cigarette, but I didn’t know what I wanted to turn this mind upon. Failing to convince Bella to join me for a walk, I arrived at this choice, mostly because I began last night, Ash Wednesday, to systematically work through Gaston Fessard’s Dialectic of the spiritual exercises.
The third is that Hantaï’s pliage makes sense in a completely new way, which is also the same way, but more fully.
What I feel most strongly is this: That I find in Hegel the nearest neighbor--more near than Heidegger’s Being and Time, in which I also found 2 or 3 years ago what was at that time the nearest neighbor I'd found to what I'm really up to in hoping for anything to come out of my turning to painting. What I'm talking about is what I've talked about previously in terms of wanting to lay out more clearly, more legibly, more followably, more reproducibly, more knowably, more avowably, more basically and more authentically than ever before, a way of looking, a way of thinking, a way of painting. Conceiving my ambition in these terms has been, for a while, since at least 2023, the only way I’ve been able to think of my project--a bare conviction--as something of any use for anyone, anyone other than myself and even including myself. (With all that is available to everyone now, only the superlative that I'm trying to articulate by means of these several approximate superlatives is the one that lends my painting, and most of all my approach toward it (an approach that I have tried at every stage to realize as fully and as truly as ever I could) any use at all, any quality at all. Perhaps at various points in the past I have very poorly tried to say what I mean here by using phrases such as “from first principles” or “from square one” or simply by pointing to Heidegger or to Rilke or even to Descartes. I could just as usefully have pointed to an early Wittgenstein, and given a listener just as much cause to doubt. What I am finding here in Hegel is something which much more closely reflects what I mean. It's not a

matter of first principles, of axioms and their faithful extrapolation or unfolding; it’s not a matter of axioms, and never could have been, and I’ve known that for long, since the solidity of axioms dissolved for me twelve years ago. Instead, and this is what I get from Hegel from the very first sentences (and what I thought was original to Heidegger), it’s a matter of closely examining, while putting into play a manner of proceeding, a delicate system of such a manner, which incorporates the proceeding as well as the looking, and the saying, and even the eventual legibility thereof. It’s easy to size this up as an intractable ambition: Countless unsuccessful realizations thereof can immediately be ideated, and no matter how long Hegel indulged his own realization’s writing out, any shortcoming of clarity anywhere in his corpus can lend validity to all of these refutations. Like anyone else, I know this. But this is still the type of thing that I want more than anything else to try, because it’s not about making something that can’t be refuted. It’s about making something that can be used.

And as a single footnote to add, from among countless possible ones, I only point out that this text is positively littered with observations sharp enough to inspire a heuristic kind of confidence in its author’s perceptivity, faithfulness, truth to life, acuity, ingenuity, even humility of a sort of perverse kind, analogous in all this to no one so much as to Cézanne (although, at times, these acuities, prodigious unto the point of propheticism (and herein I see why so many times it's been said that modernity starts in Hegel’s vision, over-generous though this has always sounded), make me think rather of Matisse, Matisse even more than Cézanne, Matisse’s color, Matisse’s mind-cracking, his prayerfulness, his openness toward color.

Just one more footnote. I was thinking often of pliage, thinking, though this is probably not the order in which it happened, of Hantaï turning toward The phenomenology of spirit after having encountered Fessard’s Hegelian Ignatius, and then finding, in 1959, in Hegel’s astounding figurations of unfolding, the impetus for a new art that would change everything. And I thought--miserable thought, in that it cheapens everything that an étude is, an étude like the green one at the end of my slideshow or the monumental blue one in Orleans, in its perfect oneness and economy, its gesture in and as the painting, and vice versa, to idly modernismicize. At risk of cheapening this, I still record this second footnote: I thought of a new pliage, in which the unstretched canvas is folded, but the left and right edges are stretched and tacked to a loose, straight bar, while the rest of the loose canvas. is crumpled uniformly and then covered in paint (as in an étude) (perhaps in this case it would be white paint, and/or a sort of brownish caput mortuum, laid along the stretched, lateral, straight edges). And, in the stretching of this painting, most crucially, most newly, is the transitions that make themselves clear between the straight lateral edges and the central allover. This would be something even closer to Hegel than the pliage that I've come to know is. But I redeem my cheapening with the following observation, which immediately followed on the above idea: That this is precisely what

the Catamurons have been doing all along, and I've just never noticed it, and this is why I've never really looked at them, not how I should have The Catamurons and even some Mariales, maybe even all of them, for all I know: Anywhere that the allover takes a specific, and not synecdochal, stance toward (that is, realization of) the bound, the border, the bar, the edge, the limit, the origin, the horizon, the beginning, the end.

22 February 2026

Today I made a very strange spreadsheet (strange to have made a spreadsheet, strange to be so callous as to call it a spreadsheet), having woken up with this feeling:

The thinking was that it would have some advantage over the little mess of papers and file folders that I was struggling to put to use on Wednesday. It would be nice if I didn’t have to look at the screen that hurts my eyes, because good things never happen under those conditions.

When Paul Sietsema and I agreed that the excessively pessimistic picture of art writing offered by the “panel” at Artcenter last Tuesday could have been at least partially offset by the inclusion of someone working somewhere in the vast chasm between the professionals and Diva Corp, the first name to his mind was Dean Kissick, whereas mine was Sean Tatol. It reminded me of his earlier mention (when I first met him, delivering his aluminum-panel-backed burlap-linen canvas) of Oliver Osborne, when I brought up having seen his work included in the Francis Irv String of tongueless bells.
Multiple lines (their individual tensions) are present in my mind at the moment: An Osborne drawing that was used as the cover for a monograph that Distanz published, and these Israhel van Meckenem etchings, and the image of the embracing couple with that hat (is it, too, van Meckenem?) which I found from Sean Tatol.

No: It was Urs Graf:

Stray notes to append to all of the spreadsheet work I did today. First, a note on the structure of the spreadsheet, and how I finally conjured the stomach to go ahead and rearrange my thinking along spreadsheet lines today. The note has to do with flow tree arborescence, etcetera, and I should stick it in the top left corner of the first sheet in my workbook (so-called).
“I am impelled to imagine these mistily projected developments with a different picture, leaving the Longstreth-Hetzler model picture aside because of its spatial limits, trading it for a flow-tree more or less resembling my old “Carta,” an arborescence not without subsequent re-fusions previously-divergent branches, an arborescence marked even more prevalently by sites of influence exerted magnetically (and mutually, if asymmetrically) among disparate sites / limbs / lobes (a dynamic which reminds me of the folding of a complicated peptide).”
Second: I wrote a very abbreviated note about “Chernobio” in that first sheet. There’s a note from February 7th, in which I mentioned the limewood altarpieces of the upper Rhine. The linkage here has to do with more than just the structure (which, by the way, still feels to me so eminently appropriate, and on this appropriateness, by the way, this adequation, I can't now recall the directionality of the connection, whether I first derived my idea for the structure of the Como paintings from a consideration of Baxandall’s study of the limewood altarpieces or otherwise. This connection, at this point, in

any case, is pre-existing to my tapehead self. I don't know how it came about. And underneath that connection, I still feel such abiding feelings that there is a sort of high-place-ness that holds aloft my broken opinions: of Heidegger, of Pound, of the workings of memory, of Lombardy, of da Vinci, of his Rocks Madonnas, and all his paintings; and of Proust, who affords a more avowable schema for these same things--and the list goes on.

In this particular vision of that baroqued structure, kaleidoscopic color, the space of that landscape and the dizzying transport all at once through the entire sequence of one's most beautiful memories and the most painful ones too, all of the same moment, redeeming everything, opening up all the flows so that the beauty percolates among the sinews of all of the pain and stoppage, in a way that sounds, of course, too good to be true, and I can't convince anyone about it, and I don't mean to, not at this stage, maybe in the espresso cup parts of my unfolding.

Then there were some ideas about text, which no longer feel available, but I still want to put them in the "floating" row of this sheet and mark them before anything else with a note that they don't feel available. But within those notes there was something about sequencing that I still think is important.

There were also two notes from the "idée fixe" (Picabia and Trockel) piece by Tatol which I think are broadly worth hanging onto in the background; but I can't remember what either of them was about.

And a third one, also from Tatol, about Jutta Koether, which I cursorily noted but which I'd like to pin down in more specific terms. I feel much too stupid for this right now and should probably give up before I make anything any worse.

Then there's another pretty general series of thoughts on this whole "new start,"* beginning with a mention of "patina" and "baseball" and ending with the mention of the Manet lion hunter in São Paulo. I think after that point, my mind turns to more specific thoughts, beginning with plaid, which should be pasted to the too-rudimentary note currently in the "plaid" page of the sheet.

[*I call it a "new start" only with maximum counterfactuality--a counterfactuality that is not irony, but actually fiction. As a side note, about the difference between fiction and irony: I've talked about this before, beginning in 2023, but I'll say it one more time. Irony has no place for my generation because it's already been played to bits. It became the only language, and was thereby drained of all possibilities. Now the only things of value leave that language behind, which can only really happen by complete digestion and coming out the other side, a total internalization and then a total departure. And I think still, as I said before, that the place to go next has to do with the notion of complete fresh-start-ness: in a humble way, a way that has to do with fiction, such as Strau and Espresso Cup and Mallarmé himself understood it. It could hardly be farther from the version of "a fresh start" that has become one of the basic aspects of modernism, because it's not a generic idea, so collective as to be completely nonspecific: It's the polar opposite,

it’s hyperspecific and completely individual, it only works if you completely recreate it every time anew for yourself. And so the art that’s worthwhile here, is that which functions not as a once-for-all, but as the best-yet in a series of possible models (I’m speaking not of termite art but of totally fresh new ways in like Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and Heidegger’s analytic of dasein from Being and Time), and yet for all this still somehow (and newly) not some final statement so austere and universal as to have superseded everything that came before either by a never-before-seen ingenuity or brute force. Rather, it’s that which cracks open some space in just the right place, like Mallarmé’s fan for his daughter, like Luke Herrigel described for Eyrie Alzate. Maybe I'm off the line.

Note that I haven't proceeded back through my notes any farther than the lion hunter because my document isn’t really working.

In a speculative way, I think about how to eventually incorporate certain images which I've already almost created, figures, really almost paintings, but still not quite. I'm talking about the Freikorperkardinal, Ludovic Nemo ass-first, and even my versions of Madame Brunet, even my thoughts on portraiture, and nudes, derived from Modigliani alongside Pontormo. And, most recently, my having conflated Juliet Gréco and Maria Callas and, before realizing I’d done so, agonizing over the fact that I couldn't paint that painting of “her” that I'd seen in the museum of the city of Paris, feeling that such a painting would be for me the perfect realization in my Ludovic Nemo fiction-key that which Joseph Geagan paints more directly personal-socially, feeling these aches while reading about the delightfully twentieth-century-core fiction of Greek shipping tycoons. Of course, having now realized they're different people, I can simply paint the other one, and it's as easy as that: A new Madame Brunet, a new Watteau Diana, and this injects new life somewhere far along. The line of painting as lyric about la donna, beyond Madonnas and children and horti conclusi and paintings of my Bella, ma Belle.

Anyway, to come back to what I was initially positing as my big speculation, it occurred to me that perhaps before I have wriggled anywhere close to any kind of representational or figurative imagery in my restretching paintings, there will remain a certain move very much available to me: To be perfectly timed at a juncture of greatest impact: And if I pull it off, it will be the greatest realization of what I will hopefully have by then pulled off once already so far in a successful way--that is, the fictionalization of a painter--: And this move that I'm talking about will be to finally bring forth paintings like the Freikorperkardinal and the others I mentioned above, paintings which will hopefully be seen as new and good and all but possible for a painter who could well be, or may well have been, I mean, who may well be or could well have been, my own self. If these succeed, they will only do so by the sheer specificity of their vision, the sheer development of their individuation, as an extreme counterpoint to the unparalleled stuttering I will have thus far leant into.

25 February 2025

Repeating a memory of a worm’s-eye of the floor, it had to be chez Lipp where the horse dealers caught up with me, reconstructed sense linked to resurfacing sense, my cheek felt the linoleum or the aluminum or the parquet, it was 1969 or 1979 or 2022 in order for it to have been 1889, it was in the Uraniastrasse in order for it to have been on the Boulevard Saint-Germain

This would be a better press release than the overwrought one, I think, for a “first room” exhibition, because this one actually allows it to act as a fiction in the way that I’ve painstakingly and repeatedly described over the course of the last month. However I still want to call it “Autobiography of Ludovic Nemo.” So then what? Every sight torments me. The most painful are the ones which I thought would save me, save everything. My espresso cup itself breaks my heart. Yesterday I reread an essay Sean Tatol wrote about a Baudelaire fragment and the state of near-impossibility of art. It reminded me of the phrase “white-knuckle”: “... It might approximate getting too high and having a three-hour white knuckle meltdown only to do it again the next night just because it’s better than feeling nothing ….” This phrase is very useful to me because I always struggle to express what is happening when I sit, frozen--not frozen, very agitated--for hours, from my insufficient waking-up all through one sort of breakdown or another sometime usually around the early or mid afternoon. If Bella is here, she sees me pacing, hears me address incoherencies to her, gets annoyed at how “dramatic” I am, offers her best advice and gets frustrated when it is not applicable, which is my fault really because in that state I cannot even explain why her suggested option is not available to me. “White-knuckling” is, basically, what I do every day that I am neither working nor expressly setting everything aside to go out and do something with Bella or someone else nor finding myself from the start with a physical or cognitive hangover which often prevents me from even working up my expectations of “myself with an open day.”

Today in particular I fell apart before midday. In my autistic fit my eyes moistened without giving over to flowing tears; I gripped the flesh on the backs of my upper arms, clawing with both hands at once, without the release of the spellbreaking surprise of finding my body actually harmed; I convulsed; I reached with shaking hands--for minutes, I was condemned to go through motions, this humiliating sentence, shaking, the charade of moving bottles from shelves to counters and mixing things in cups, so that I could put Fernet and vermouth into gin. Meanwhile frozen kimbap was in the microwave so that nausea or a sharp pain wouldn’t overwhelm the slight tingling sensation of a slow increase in insensitivity--that barely but reliably palpable sensation upon which everything depends.

Last night, I told Bella I intended to drink, to drink up and to drink full. I failed, because on the two-hour drive home I developed an ache in my stomach that I tried to quickly resolve with a walk, which only intensified it; I couldn't figure whether it was digestive (as usual) or an abdominal muscle cramp or (this prospect excited me, in the same way that the fantasized hope of being hit by a car saved me from many a local-maximum of exhausted overburnt ennui in 2022 or 2023 or 2024 or 2025--one skin-crawling laceration on my arm for the novel frisson of the way those names of years stack up, I've seen that frisson on my face, in new shadows if not new lines, new protrusions of once-smooth forms, if no one else can see them I can and I drink to them). By eight p.m. I had arranged myself horizontally because I couldn't bear to be upright for more than sixty seconds at a time, the internet had convinced me that a pain this sharp in this region and correlated thus to gravity could only have resulted from a liver set to wandering (hematoptosis) by inflammation, and I did not dare to open any of the eighty dollars' worth of bottles of liquor I'd purchased (the majority covered by a gift card sent by my parents to Bella and me in celebration of Valentine's day, a gift whose practicality was in all likelihood motivated by the steadily dwindling balance of my bank account, now nearing the critical waterline which is my share of one month's rent, which I have not told my parents about but which I suspect they could see if they tried, through our shared bank and the mysteriously partial connection between our accounts) in an optimistic commitment made on the way home from work in total despair over the brokenness of my body, the ache in my back and the exhaustion of my shoulders and core and the rawness of my left thumb and the growing contorted knobbiness of my overuse of those joints on Grotjahn's absurdly overdrawn instructions (I become a goblin, writhing in pain and endlessly rehearsing thoughts that no one--not my colleagues, not Bella, let alone my supervisors--could fail to scoff at; I imagine Peter pulling the expression of profound disappointment that was prompted by the news that Noah's rear windshield had been smashed and his keyboard stolen, if ever he could be told what thoughts fill my head, what an utter detachment from reality courses through my repetition-addled mind in an ineluctable daily rhythm, glacial, frantic, murderably hopeful in the mornings, shellshocked into resolve by the evenings, yet always checked by the comically solid responseless reception of my every application for other work. I lick the grease-streaming copper-wire-burnt sidewalk (What I see means nothing. Complete divergence from actuality) in abject gratitude when I remember the sensation that washed over me--I was at Taron, I called everyone, Bella, my sister, my parents--when they emailed me the offer of a job, the only ones who ever did, almost a year into a gradually intensifying flood of applications, dozens upon dozens).
A second martini. Under whose authority could I choose the afternoon without it instead. Addled, addled, addled, I lose my vocabulary not as some genericized drying-up but rather as a distillation into certain vocables that are neither quintessential synecdoche nor random dross, some delicious combination thereof, that's real collapse,

addled, white-knuckle, convulsively autistic writhing.
I've replaced my aspiration to make beautiful pictures with an aspiration toward a perfectly speechless gesture (that is what I have been trying to describe for three weeks), perfectly hollow, lower than low, as dependable as an insomniac's breath upon glass, a single gesture more eloquent than an aggregation of flinches toward words.
And then I find the consummation--impossible to predict but obviously inevitable--of this pivot in my breakdown-inability to manage the filling-out of the fucking spreadsheet I created in an attempt to carry it out.
And now to go out for a drive. It's only less dull than its correspondent fictional trope because it's real--reality, farce, pastiche, a temptation that Nabokov knew well enough to avoid, any real artist could bear to hold it within fiction, but not me, I slit my guts and let them spill over the borders I bound myself to.
I did not take a second martini, but neither did the first make it possible for me to put into type even the single idea which I grabbed this morning from out of the closing fog of my brain's cancer (which does not feel like fog so much as an attenuation, a painful sparseness rather than a painful constriction, the impotent struggle to string two inferences or linkages or deductions together, never carrying past isolated half-ideas into compelling images in thought, let alone into courses of actualizable action, not in months, not in years, not ever).

27 February 2026

Perhaps I can pitch to LARB a piece on the Nancy Holt exhibition at the Schindler house, which can talk as much about the light & space at the house as it does at the photographs, and kind of Hadland-ambivalently (re. the promise of minimalism, re. the specific promises of Schindler's manifestoed modernism) wander through those absolutisms while gradually painting a half-doomed half-gonzo half-sunseeker appreciation for the fragmented effects-aspects, instantaneous gorgeousnesses profligately scattered by the monolithic (geological, cosmological, perfect-geometrical, axiomatic-absolutist) aesthetic-machines at play. I can mine both the "pursuit of greece" descriptions of light and clarity and lens-like air, and "sun seekers" for (hopefully) Schindler-circle-sourced opinions on California light & space.

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Blanchot's writing on the siren's song has immense bearing upon the

character & status of my “autobiography of Ludovic Nemo”

3 March 2026

Names which have, at some time or another, at least to someone or other, stood for capital itself:

Lydia
Cyprus (? – Luxury from everywhere concentrates on the island)
Athens (? – the far-flung croppings-up of Attic vase painting, archeologically materializing the Athenian trade network; I mean the Athens of the Delian league)
Venice la Serenissima
So far it is always a matter of connecting East with West
The United States
Dia
Mark Grotjahn

14 March 2026

As ever, there are too many reasons not to break my silence; lately, most of them revolve around a sense of duty to be faithful to my all-too-real and all-too-suffocating fallowness (I use this word with only too much self-flattery).

Too many reasons not to break my silence, too many reasons to be overcome by the sort of half-thought, at best feeling like it contains something small (a little structural light-knot as Kenner would describe it), but showing no hope of imminent linking-up with anything I care about, this sort of half-thought that is all I’m capable of thinking for the last month-almost--and I mean at best, in my most lucid moments on my exceptionally rare non-requisitioned days off.

So it is, as ever, only with an acute sense of self-conscious insufficiency--even, itself, insufficiently individuated--that I break my silence for just such a one, or, glory of glories, a handful, of these half-thoughts.

I was flipping through Joseph Masheck’s “Iconicity” article, with its well-selected reproductions, and those of the paintings by Lucio Pozzi stood out to me as particularly strong even in such company. I haven’t known this artist before, and I can’t begin to have an opinion on his work’s quality from this kind of a glimpse, but what I can do--all I can do--is make these kinds of throwaway formal judgments on just that structure-plane which, in each of the works in question, is scale-independent enough (etc.) to arrive to me as a survival of the palimpsest of mediatizations undergone thereby (I

don’t mean only, or even primarily, the operation of photography itself; even more decisive is the dizzying and inescapable specific contextualization in which they arrive to me; I mean not just “the internet” but all the specificity and nuance of the art media machine).

All that for this:

This painting, if handicapped by its distracting square-centrality, has something good in common with certain Lukas Quietzsch paintings I have always liked so much, pasted below it;

These do too, and each adds something else good to the equation: The first, a rare kind of layering (superposition on an authentically distantiated plane; this distantiation is valorizable because superposition so often almost immediately capitulates to plane-collapse, not just because of painting-native dynamics but even more so because of the mediatizations I was talking about) shared by Grotjahn’s slugs and little else; the second, besides the breathtakingly poor image quality, because its composition is good in precisely the way I was valuing a year and more ago, and am valuing still, that which it shares with de Kooning’s Judgment Day and not so much else.

This was the first reproduction of his which caught my eye.

I love this installation for the way in which its hanging does something neighbor to Malevitch's top-corner icon-corner hanging, neighbor also to what I thought once (in 2023, etc.) to do, and still would like to do, re-staging the Holbein Ambassadors painting-objecthood-euphoria in a distinctive new Rilke-Bon-dieu tone-register.

I also really liked the sculpture in it; I think, after listening to the first lecture in his three-part series, that Charles Ray would find it authentically sculptural too; I like in it the same thing I like in David Smith's non-square-language works, the same thing I like in some of Vincent Fecteau, the same thing I like in almost all of Anthony Caro, the same thing in the seven Grotjahn sculptures I saw in the antechamber of his studio complex when, a year late, I finally gained access.

But after all this it was this painting which finally tipped me over that rankling line and made me start to make a note, because it was just too very similar to one of the half-thoughts blinking into my head in the last month.

The half-thought was this: That, "later in my (fictional) painting career," at some point around the time when I am able to make truly sublimely scaled (and, again, I don't quite mean monumental) re-stretching paintings in white and off-whites and Luini reds and greens and Como blues and other Como colors and Vatican City porphyry and one of many of the self-ties constituting this knot is even the filming of Naboo and but the strongest pin (or "chaplet," word for a bolstering pin in the bronze-casting process, word which I just learned five books into the cracking open of my heart this week to follow my inscrutable and irresistible impulse to set everything else aside and learn as much as I can about ancient bronzes), yes, later, around this time, there is another kind of painting I'd like to make too, and it has less to do with verticals and more to do with stout curves that are really quite different from any of the ellipsoid curves that I've thus far thought of populating my paintings with, and without naming them I'll just paste the comparisands which were rippling into my mind even before I could thumb through the threads which turn out to constitute their matrix and figure out what is going on among and

behind and within and as and across them, or actually I will do some naming because there is a poetical necessity in the acceptance of insufficiency that is the biting down on this tongue: Jonas Wood's large round pot-paintings (the ones without plants in them, and not the ones with Suarez-Frimkess pots either, just, really, the imagined pots mediating "Matisses"); the shapes therein not relating mostly and most closely to just any Matisse, to a Red Studio or a Red Interior as in Wood's actuality but rather to the goldfish bowls and goldfish ponds which are the space-within-space which affords perhaps the most palpable figure, the easiest-graspable threshold, for a most Matisse-proper Elysium, a dream within a dream, a painting-space within a painting-space, particularly haptic and sculptural within the particularly haptic and sculptural painting-space that is the Matisse canvas itself, I digress, I recalled also before the same moment had fully formed a painting in the first exhibition I tried seriously to "review," a painting by Andrew Cranston which contained an almost-too-obvious or too-obvious reference (but then all "references" are thus) to this same goldfish-space. And come to think of it there was also that Kantarovsky painting I once tried harder than (or at least differently from) any other to copy, and my glaring copy of it.

And maybe after all there was a memory-immixed presence of certain Suarez-Frimkess pots inhabiting inside the by now rather quite deep--seven years it’s lived, even--memory of these Matisse pots, because of these fish.

On Wednesday, 11 March 2026, a day in which I visited the GRI and the Getty Villa and then laid in my sweater with my recently-found free copy of Clark’s The Nude on the beach at Topanga while the sun set and the bunch of surfers had mixed success, I paused on my way to the call number of an absent book on Cycladic art to flip through a book whose spine had caught my eye in order to take these pictures, in an idle way, not thinking of adding up to or even of adding to anything much.

So much for one of my half-thoughts. Another was to describe in as much detail as I could then before it faded any more (and, now it’s faded more, to describe now in as much detail as I can now before it fades even more) those sculptures of Grotjahn’s just inside the door of his studio which in its countless sequential spaces and side rooms and outbuildings is also a gallery and also an office and also bears a resemblance to the holdings room at the Broad with its racks of paintings.

At the Getty, this same Wednesday last, I took these pictures of pages I've already pored over for so many painfully delicious moments.

So I knew to expect, or to hope for, bronzes with their gates and vents still attached, the gate-complex surrounding, with its utterly perfect specificity and symmetry (I mean the structure with its specificity roughly dictated by the needs of the particular casting, a specificity which happens to inaugurate a gorgeous symmetry of repetitions and multidimensional bilateralisms, as well as the bronze's necessary-made texture, the age-old casting process itself practically a readymade to this ahistorical fiction of an artist "with his red new balances" rightly thought worth mentioning by the author of the irksome essay in this Gagosian book produced on the occasion of the Casa Malaparte exhibition which ran for only one day), probably, a cast of a commercially-produced (what does this qualifier even mean, right this moment?) cardboard box. Alec and I had agreed on our way over that these sculptures were among his best work; we might have called them our favorites; my heart aches, though, for so many of his paintings. While we wrapped plastic around four ninety-inch linen bars that the studio's oil ground had made to ripple, Alec and a studio assistant hired a year or too ago ("Alex," nicely) removed the "among," agreeing, after Alec first phrased his praise more ambiguously to avoid any slight to the paintings, that these sculptures are simply the best thing he makes. Immediately inside the

door, one of them stood on a three-foot cube of solid eucalyptus; if I might call it medium-sized, three medium-large ones stood in the shadows off to the right on castered studio tables, and three more medium-small ones on blocks or very low plywood plinths along the right side of the hallway leading ahead past the Broad-style storage to the under-construction “gallery” space. Some of these seemed to have had their wax models (the existence of which is still hypothetical, as their facture predated the tenure of Alex; he couldn’t answer even Alec’s question of whether they were cast in California, let alone where or exactly how) adorned with strings that at first resembled bike chains but upon closer inspection seemed--still not quite certainly--to be strings of plastic beads, the kind handmade and worn as bracelets and anklets and necklaces by children. Last, past the ones in the hall, were two to four small sculptures--I barely got to look at them, as I felt more and more like I was trespassing the farther down the hall I stepped--whose cores were not cardboard boxes but some kind of arc-lobed form, a complicated sort of form-type, the kind, again, that would have passed Charles Ray’s test, an almost bonsai-like form-type that progressively resolved in noncontinuous stages as I progressively apprehended it, abstract-materialized (as any species from specimens) between the couple of versions present across the seconds as I stepped. By arc-lobed I mean involving discrete crescent-shaped facets or transposable units, of unknown origin but by my guess achievable with scissors cutting through flat cardboard sheets in pairs of coterminous ellipsoid arcs maybe six inches in length, and somehow assembling such flat crescents into something similar in “gestalt” (though this term doesn’t quite properly apply; Ray would instead say “armature”) to the “painted sculpture” I made in Mrs. St. John’s art class when I was about nine, made by bending a clothes hanger into a shape, stretching a panty hose around it, dipping it in plaster, planting the exposed end in a lump of clay, and painting all the different surfaces with different mostly-Modern thumbnails after it all dried. I think they also had gate-complex left on, like the bigger sculptures, but their gates were much more delicate and arcing, almost like the foliage (not the knotty wood) of a weeping willow.

1 April 2026

A couple scattered notes to make while I'm on my walk at 1 p.m. on my first Wednesday off in almost a month. I will be a bit out of breath, but I can't spare this little window of clear vision that I'm feeling, given me, in equal measure, by the 68-degree sun-air cleared by yesterday’s rain, on the one hand, and on the other Joshua Chuquimia-Crampton’s Estrella por Estrella. (I've been listening to Los Thuthanaka in discontinuous repetitions, and grasping by all means

available at any related structures, textures, trances, systems, and visual off-shatter.)

So, here are the few things.

First, that it wouldn't come off as modernist-pretentious, not even to whatever degree the first exhibition at Soldes that I attended did (when I talked to the gallerist and the artist at the same time, Nicolas and Lakshmi; the exhibition that I loved, despite a palpable, slight mannerism of liberal arts school art department professorship). Even that measure of mannerism could be avoided if I temper with a graphic like the Estrella por Estrella album cover (that angry duck) the affect (which would otherwise be distasteful) of an imposed title like Fold by fold (as direct a translation as is possible of Boulez's Pli selon pli, itself a quotation of a Mallarmé line). I could use the translated English version without, I think, proximity-suffocation by the referent, if, as I say, I temper it with something that imports that specific affect.

The affect in question is related to my "little guys," as well as the frog from the "archetypical late 90s early 2000s eco-benefit tour," and so forth, abstracted by the hyper-reference of global-southism so that it doesn't come off as a straight appropriation (in the way that some works by Mario Ayala and his peers in their shared studio sometimes can, although often Ayala's own work, Like Los Thuthanaka itself, goes far enough through this hyper-reference wormhole to shed or rather to sidestep that pitfall). What's my version of the angry gator, who reminds me, I now realize, more than anything else, of the piñata duck Pokémon? (By the way, the way that it sits in my mind, it may as well be a duck as a gator. I literally cannot tell from the shallowness of my memory which it was.)

I took a photo of a faded flyer on the sidewalk this morning on a two minute walk back to our apartment from our first apartment showing in more than two years, of something, maybe a flea, which accomplishes this (and the flea's fleaness, by not being a tick, similarly narrowly dodges the late-high-modernist kitschification that the tick, like the fold, has now suffered at the hands of Deleuze's American academic appropriators, for example).

For another example, just one more: Recall that early Laura Owens painting, which alone met the criteria that Roberta Smith applied to her work categorically, namely, that it resuscitated "formal interest"

(was that it?) itself, from out of whatever post-Internet hysteria had seemed to threaten it in her environs. This Owens painting, likely a memory-conflation of mine derived from the three pasted below from Gavin Brown's Enterprise, with its globe horizon reminiscent of the unoperationalized kernel of Takashi Murakami's work, which, despite everything, maintains its interest in hyperresolved vectorism, its pixel-defiance, et cetera.

Together with such examples as these, I imagine more--but what? The paramodernist mosaics at Keur Moussa give me that which the album Kala was advertised to afford, but, in my listening, did not.

[Last photo is the church in Orange County that I attended on the night of Palm Sunday, which reminded me first of San Isidro del General and then of these photos taken for the New Yorker article in which I learned about Keur Moussa.]
A certain Grotjahn-related repetition principle, quote-unquote rhythm itself, difference or variation itself played out in the manner of Haydn, or, put more generally, in the manner of the movement of the baroque itself, which people take Deleuze to have fleshed out but which, upon my reading, he never really quite seems to, and so maybe my idea of it is more my own than it is his: what I mean is, in a manner akin to Grotjahn (but only ending up near him, not taking him as a starting point), I can do to Greek trophy cauldron tripods, and

to Chinese bronze mixing bowl tripods (that I saw at the Art Institute), and to Roman lampstand tripods, the same thing that he did to cardboard masks cast with gates (et cetera) left in place. The hope is that, in constituting this trifecta of deepest antiquity--the most academicized, most combinatorialized, most topologized, most phylogeneticized antiquity, perhaps I can blend the three into one new unity that never leans too far toward any one of the tripods (triple poles) and comes out, against all odds, as something like a Matissean superclay, with the permanent continuous surprising circumnavigation that Bois valorized (valorizing it at a skew angle to the "destruction" reading he (semiconsciously?) sought ("sought" is the crucial word) to impose, or so at least it seems to me, from my reading of his Artforum article on the Matisse sculpture show.
I am by now far up my hill, and ever more out of breath. But I have yet to make a note of this one thing that was already in my head even before I left on my walk. It was, basically, that my refolding painting ideas feel fresh and rich after so much time off. Yes, especially if I can do it in a near-square format, like the square Cézanne version of the idea that I did, but a bit bigger. I mean a bit bigger than the one whose picture I showed to Delfin Finley on his staircase upon his request, and he seemed really to like it, and to agree when I said that I thought it would look good if it were bigger. And even to independently notice that it resembled a landscape or a cityscape. So, really, all I needed was to finally show it to someone who cared a little bit about painting. And that perhaps I had become discouraged for no reason.
And this not quite small-sized near-square canvas needs to be quite thin, and stretched with Paris rather than number 12, or else some kind of very pliant linen, whether bleached or not.

A couple other stray thoughts have collected in the latter half of my walk.
First, a circular airbrushed rainbow, in some kind of paintstroke (not necessarily brushstroke) like what Mario Ayala would airbrush, but a circle, or an ellipse, paired with an American flag or paired with Dremmel-skittery arcs. The circle can be an ellipse; it can be distorted in any number of ways, to make any form that incidentally is the frontal image of any halo or hat from a Renaissance artist, especially an early Renaissance artist, especially Uccello, who had so much fun with those head-objects.
Second: The words "amor y libertad," or vice versa. I don't remember where I saw them, but they're so important because [inaudible] … better transposed into Greek. Lycurgus and Jesus.
Third: What if there were an album which lifted precisely only the rhythm--say, every atonal sound--from Jay Dilla's Donuts? So that it took only the drum beats, took the song structures, the precise track lengths, et cetera, just the tempos or rhythm-fluctuations of the whole thing, but all with completely different textures, melodies, spaces, and so forth for every part, for every region, for every

voice, in every song. It would be something akin to the remake of the Black Flag album, but that one ended up being all about memory and a personal canon; but this one, for me, would be way more about having an armature, much more in tune with what I've been proposing recently with armature, gesture, Ludovic Nemo, copying dimensions from Krebber, which goes out the end of both irony and sincerity, performing the impossibility of originality.
What textures and melodies? Stuff like from Yellowman and Bjork, and Gal Costa, and the monks of Keur Moussa, and so on (this just being shorthand for what I noted earlier). I think that if I ever found a way to do this, it would be a way of affirming what I like about Los Thuthanaka by comparison to anything from “deconstructed club” or “vaporwave,” which is not necessarily soulless, but which does leave behind the fixation on the affect of listening to something. Trance is its own specific affect, which is distinct from pop; but, in either case, it has something to communicate with quality--aesthetic quality--in paintings, compositional balance and strength, which is something I think about constantly, whether painting or not painting, relating also to the line I’ve been intermittently or passively but so crucially (to me, to my sense of wellbeing) developing lately, about a dissertation about the history of “scopophilia” (what a stand-in word) in the longue durée.

2 April 2026

There’s no reason why which comes to mind, but this morning, as I was waking up, before I was really awake, I had a thought about painting that demanded itself to be written down as nothing in the last couple of months has. It may have been that, in my half-waking, I was looking at the edges of the canvases that hang around my bed. I think I thought about how I liked the way I did the corners on one of them, placing the fold on the side and angling the fold away from the corner in a way that feels somehow polygonal and robust.
I wrote this idea down on a piece of paper that I left on the kitchen table. I'll paste it below. And I add that, I think, in a painting like this that I make, the final stretch ought to have its corners done after the manner mentioned above. By way of a talisman, marking the unique mode of emergence of this idea. A sign like a navel.

5 April 2026

Last night was the beginning of Easter. Until 3 a.m. I watched The Last Temptation of the Christ, but before that I went to the evening vigil at St. Casimir, after spending a few hours at the Hollyhock House and drinking ouzo and mint and lemon juice.

At one moment in the mass, right upon receiving the Eucharist, a chain of notions intertwined, and I'm not quite sure in what shape it coheres, only that the interlockings themselves are sitting deep in the center of my heart.

Earlier in the week I had watched the first small chunk of Scorsese's Last Temptation, and before that The Mission with Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons. Irons's priest, Gabriel, was insistent that God is love; the identification between the two, according to his words and his actions unto death, is total.

In Mass I wondered that Jesus, the incarnation of love, is so different from any personification of the Greek or Renaissance varieties. In an epistle or in Acts, I don't remember where, a hard line is drawn between the God of the new covenant and the gods of the gentiles, generally classed as personifications of elemental forces or the like.

The first instinct of a thought is that love, as it is understood here, is the unique "elemental force" (it, in fact, does not fit under this category) which, incarnate, is no "personification" of that sort at all. (Aside, I wonder that time did not give rise to a personification which likewise broke the system; I don't see the fraying at the edges of the mythological fabric around the figure of Kronos, unless Hesiod's Theogony be taken for the evidence or imprint of precisely that.)

If this is so, why did not Eros or Cupid or Venus or Turan or Inanna or Hathor or Xochiquetzal short-circuit their respective systems? Naturally I turn, for my guess, to the distinction between eros and agape.

(Earlier this week, on Wednesday, on a gorgeous walk spent listening mainly to Chuquimia-Crampton and followed by Simón's ceviche, from out of the beauty and the noise a strange emblem distinguished itself to me, having the character of a translation of a remembered formula; it was "amour et liberté," which I recognized as a translation of "amor y libertad," though I couldn't say where the latter had come from; and upon a moment's further meditation I adjusted my translation to "agape, eleutheria," and said into my microphone (notes which I have yet to paste) something about Lycurgus and Christ, having thought, first, of a different moment than the Grecophone one, namely the Renaissance, having, in fact, been thinking hard about the Renaissance over the course of some several weeks as I turned from a relatively intense steeping in classical and archaic bronzes and Homer to Cellini's autobiography, trying to lay hands upon

what it could be that makes the Greek impulse alive still today even after the Renaissance has already apotheosized what its revival (rebirth, indeed) can mean, and coming, in this moment on my hill, finally, to this answer: That that whose rebirthing is spent and not to be reuptaken is the canonization of the classical aesthetic; that that which is eternally alive and whose impulse I am always actually responding to is something else entirely--reaching always back far past Pericles to whatever repetition itself I loved in Geometric pottery, having chosen Prof. Maxmin's Archaic ("more like Calder") rather than Classical for my first-ever art class and loving, there, the Sounion kouros over the Kritios, and the little lost-wax bronze horse far beyond anything Hellenistic. And what is it? I still can't name it, but here it goes under the sign of eleutheria, self-determination, Freedom, Liberty, after the fashion of Godard and Duchamp and Picasso and some very few Americans and some twinkling lights in the darkness elsewhere in the world and history.

I've lost the opportunity to put all this into words elegantly. I will now try only to put into place the last flash which was truly at the core of the shape which impressed itself upon me in the moment in which my knees contacted the kneeler, the bread still only just integrating into my own body. It was Dante, first in his role as a unique extreme case in my typology of "personifications of love," the Dante of the Vita Nuova, the Love who held the scarlet-garmented body of Beatrice in his arms. Is it Eros? Or is it that other Love, Christ, the Incarnation? Or (losing elegance in my words and concepts) is it the Spirit, the very en-personation of the Love between Father and Son? The genesis-key to the Dante who later was to take on his full raiment as fountainhead of the Renaissance, source-spring of the floruit of a thousand ways of Grecianizing personifications, from Botticelli to Flaminio to Michelangelo.

And in all of this, "God is Love" and (is it the same thing? Is this really an equivalence and therefore commutative?) "Love is God" (in the question of that difference lies everything I tried to leaf through in this shape) and everything that follows from it, I can't help but feel I am right at the fraying edge of the Nancyean analytic of God as the horizon of Being (almost the whole Bataille-Blanchot-Nancy tradition, which may or may not be the authentic tradition of the via negativa that goes back to Eckhart). That mode of pursuit goes far, but it might unwind and lose its compelling usefulness right here: If God is only the name for the unnameable, the stand-in of a name for that beyond any attribution of qualities or any understanding at all, then how can God be Love?

11 April 2026

Right now it is Saturday, almost 11:00, and despite the fact that I've

laid eyes on nothing but my laptop for the three hours I've been awake (and that having spent the whole latter half of the past week with the clearest of plans to just finish thinking about my photographic-sourced etiologies I'm grafting into the fiber of my armature's being), despite that, I feel now more than ever that almost all of the tectonic components of my big prism (the prism that is my work in the sense of corpus and œuvre, the total system of it, that is, the system defined with some kind of inductive inclusion operation in the manner that re-Symbolism requires with its accounting for all sensible dimensions of the aesthetic object) are in place or are imminently coming into place!

I want to say what I've been idly but pleasantly running my mind over in these two-and-a-half hours since getting my simple coffee and my simple slice of bread and eggs inside of me, but first I want to say something that without that context might be illegible-because-esoteric but which really feels like the whole matter right now, what it all pivots on, the big bottleneck, the sticking point upon whose near-undecidability depends

But what I'm talking about might really be completely immaterial, just an inconsequential matter of mental organization that concerns no one but me.

Anyway, it is this: That I have been finding consistent success in thinking of my yet-unrealized work in terms of a dualized superposition. (By "finding consistent success" I just mean that I can use these terms without thought-system-collapse; that I can think a thought in these terms and not break down entirely at once; which is altogether not common for me on this subject.) And that this dualized superposition's two layers, or two components, not in any particular order, are these: The (auto-)fictionalized identity of the artist; and the demand of painterly quality in the tradition that I have often (with certain problems, minor or persistent) called "re-Symbolist" but have lately (with somewhat more success) taken to naming as the tradition of Mondrian and Matisse. Roughly, by holding what it is that I am up to in this particular shape, I am able to largely successfully proceed about my circuit of subjects which I like to perambulate, and feel as though I have an authentic and possible and fruitful disposition on the subject of each of these subjects, whether the subject be Strau or Krebber (via the barely-there identity-flicker dimension which will always and everywhere be active), or Polke or Beuys (quite directly through Strau and Krebber--or, equivalently, through the same circuit by which I relate satisfactorily to Strau or Krebber), or to my persistent habitus-manner or looking at paintings and finding out whether they are good or not and taking pleasure in them if they are good (this habitus-manner of mine which persists whether I am in a gallery off Western or at the Getty, whether I am in the Louvre or David Kordansky), or trying to probe the tenability of the discursive underpinnings of the systems of Fried or Bois or Tatol (which systems are the recurrent sounding-boards of this habitus-manner of looking of my own), or meeting (in certain clearings of the mind and the museum-gallery system) with the heights of the

achievements of the heroes of this habitus-manner (Matisse and Mondrian at their best; nor is this twofold definition-by-paragon susceptible to ossification, because Cézanne and Raphael stand inside its beams and so do Michelangelo and da Vinci and Gauguin and Picasso and Bonnard and Balthus, all these providing bolster to the way in which this habitus-manner approaches every sort of quality in painting at any level of detail or texture or grain or hapticity or luminousness or vibrancy or gut-strength or voluptuousness or symmetry or balance or weight or verticality or expansiveness or sparseness or activity or flicker or stability or depth or shallowness or tautness or figurativity or indexicality or vitality or phenomenologicality or painterliness or neuroticism or finish or surety or openness).

I fell prey to a certain inclination to name while the naming was good. I was in the middle of describing the ongoing success of my twofold layer-structure, my two-ply conception. I just ought to add that it's indispensable that what these two layers make accessible to me ("make possible" to use Eliot's words about art and today and Joyce and the Odyssey) encompasses everything that I might by necessity turn my mind upon in order to get through the inertia of any "one more day"; in other words, anything in which I find the most interest or promise at any point, anything I turn to to give me some attention-redemption in any moment of boredom or discouragement during any workday or morning or evening that feels unredeemable due to its failure to trend away from monotony and toward redemptive newness. If this be Greek bronze or Olga Balema, Gal Costa or Jay Dilla, Lolita or Hemingway, or even goddamned Nota Bene or goddamned Friday Heaters, with whatever shred of light I derive from the fascination or the admiration or the repulsion or the negation or the synthesis of any of these, in each I must return to a sense of fruitfulness and possibility and promise in my understanding of my painting and my painting-to-come, or else must of necessity (undeniable demand!) reformulate my painting and my painting-to-come. This is how I live, how I have come to live, who knows how, cannot live otherwise-than, have been living for at least five years now. That's exactly how it is like to live as me.

But even on a morning like this, when, as I keep saying, I am experiencing a consistent sensation of well-functioning in this two-ply of Mondrian-Matisse picture-quality (on the one hand) and fictionalization-operationalization of the (figuration of the? Identity of the?) artist (on the other), I experience doubts and questions which are at least as threatening to this ongoing smooth-running as is the sheer prodigiousness of forgetfulness, vanishing into thin air, that is also everywhere palpable as a brutal fact about living as me. (I forget everything, almost everything.)

Here are today's doubts. Isn't three better than two--stronger, more structurally satisfying, and also more alive, more dynamic? Shouldn't I think of the superposition that is my painting (taken whole) and my every painting (without exception) as having three layers, three coincident-immanent realities, rather than these two? I have Erin Calla Watson to blame for this thought's intrusion, a

single remark from her that I read, once, some months ago: “I judge my work by a rule of three. I ask myself: What is in conflict in the installation or within a discrete image? If only two things are opposing, then it’s boring and I know I need to find a third element.” Perhaps this remark returns to me lately--though it must not have ever left--because of the following chain of events: I realized a few weeks ago that Ehrlich Steinberg is a different gallery from Reisig and Taylor, and that I hadn’t been to Ehrlich Steinberg, so I went this past Wednesday to their Nature Morte exhibition, talked at some length with Ace about what was going on, I mentioning “90s Cologne,” he countering with “80s Cologne and New York” and the Zwirner catalogue No Problem (with its excellent Diedrichsen essay that I read the next day), I playing along with “70s Cologne and New York” and the recent Krebber talk at Dia on Warhol. I spent much time that evening with Oetting’s essay written for the present exhibition.

And if three is better than two, then what are the three? “Alchemy” (or “sympathetic magic” as Daniel Spaulding says for Beuys and Hal Foster seconds him) is first to my mind: The caput mortuum and the duck fat (in the company of only the most painting-history-core of materials--canvas or linen, charcoal, rabbit skin glue, chalk or marble dust to round out the total material profile of what I make) being very nearly quite as visible as the armature itself and the fictional-artist chicanery which fills in all the rest of the material footprint of the work (in the expanded sense which includes titles and press releases and any discourse or printed matter which is to come and also my own self and comportment: I mean that share which institutional critique made impossible to ignore and which the 21st-century arcs of biographism and identitarianism and personality-ism, all the wild visibilities which are the changes brought in by the new in today’s culture, in general and for artists). So maybe that’s a pretty neatly aligning trifold, tripod, three-ply. But of course any other number of delineations could have been cast: There are other candidates for a “third leg” (I smile inside every time), and there are multiple ways to carve up the territory named by alchemy or by any other candidate into the prior twofold scheme. Thus I remain unsettled and this remains a doubt or a questioning.

There is another doubt or questioning which feels more urgent: Does this two-register structure read as an excuse-structure? Does the “conceptual” structure “imported” by fiction feel like something extraneous, a cosmetic applied to the exterior of my “painting itself,” the latter therefore understood to be in need of such an excuse, something on its own inexcused, inert formalism, vapid painting, commercially viable and lightweight, or, even worse, horror of horrors, commercially-oriented to begin with? I am naming every serious painter’s bête noir; in some sense there’s nothing specific to me about this anxiety; but on the other hand I have consciously sought to address it by direct negation, to problematize it and subvert it rather than trying to sidestep it or turn aside from it, to do something with that anxiety as such, as a trope, by locating it within the scope of the parable that is my painter-fiction, by heightening

the lighter-than-air barely-there-ness of my painting rather than trying to pad it out, by pushing even farther than Ryman or Twombly or Krebber into true austerity (I mean austerity as authentically applied to painting, not the figuration of austerity as a means toward a sublime end but rather the austerity that is negation itself--the austerity of Francis Picabia rather than Sterling Ruby, say, Jasper Johns rather than Clyfford Still).

The stakes of this last doubt is precisely this: To have an art practice that is structurally compromised by such an excuse-dynamic is to be vulnerable to a particular sort of violence, that of running a knife between two lobes that ought to be thoroughgoingly and organically intergrafted. And so--Is it? Or is it all really empty?

Such are my delay-tactics today; this is what I turn my mind to rather than just going ahead and painting. Only the doubtless--pure faith--can proceed straight into action without repression. Repression is easily cloaked under many different guises of habit, but good painting demands nothing less than its total confrontation, and so I patiently pass countless mornings like this, my white nights of painting.

As a footnote I merely list the things I turned my mind over while the above thoughts took durationless shape before I turned to putting them down in words (which took one hour).

Sergej Jensen and Julia Rommel as my painting's nearest pseudomorphic comparisands (whose work what is really going on in each, upon this latest re-evaluation, seems again to have no substantial bearing upon what is really going on in my own, beneath truly strong superficial points of contact). A loose arc from Yve-Alain Bois through Daniel Spaulding. A different loose arc from Isa Genzken through Olga Balema, and thence circulating around Win McCarthy, Donald Judd, Michael Asher, Patrick Crowley, relief and diaphane, post-minimalist space, and whether all of this can have to do with a properly becoming-lighter-than-air which will help all my recent thinking about bronze and relief and sculpture (Matisse's, Grotjahn's, Ghiberti's, three antiquities' tripods, and almost Charles Ray--but not quite, despite two full-length lectures and many sculptures in Chicago--and all this stemming, I think, from the ineffable quality of pre-Hellenistic Greek casting like that of the Getty boy and the small population to which he belongs and of a certain aspect of whose character the Smurf-print blanket in Gaza is talismanic).

When above I said that alchemy was just one of the candidates for a third layer, another possibility besides alchemy, another lens, that is, through which everything can be viewed, is that all I'm really trying to do is to be a true heir to Simon Hantaï, or simply to truly succeed his paintings, to make something authentically after them. Simply to have an influence, and therefore to be an artist, not just to be influenced, or to fail to emerge out of a teacher's shadow (here I am abstracting Hantaï into the general role of teacher--maître--which I have made much of in the past and which has not recently been at the very forefront of the Ludovic Nemo fiction but which is at

least as important to it as any of its other elements: the Volpini exhibition, Brasserie Lipp, the horse dealers, and so forth; the tile or parquet floor, the coffee cup, Sint Martens Latem, Chinese cauldrons and Greek tripods in the Villa van Wassenhove alongside the missing panel of the Ghent altarpiece.

Anyway, I've become sidetracked, and that was just a note. But that note-sidetrack was germane to what I did set out to say, which is this:

A strong answer, I think, to the most serious of my doubts:

That the only way in which the superposition of distinct layers becomes not an excuse structure, but an authentic re-Symbolist or re-Formalist (which is just to say, authentically aesthetic, fabbro-artistic) unifying, is if the two layers don't simply coexist, but positively interlock. And if I'm thinking in terms of three layers and making of them a tripod, the obvious--too obvious--figure would be that I need to make of the three strands a braid. But I don't like this because it is trite. So instead I turn to a different figure: to make of the three poles a tripod, which could either be a lampstand or a trophy cauldron or a mixing vessel but in any case a real unified object which has its three legs, each of them a “third leg,” and stands on them, stands on each of them, stands on all of them.

As an aside: What security do I find in this almost Pythagorean, almost mystical insistence on the elegance of tropes like twofoldness and threefoldness? For now, I just say that it’s less a sense of security in stability than it is a sense of fruitfulness, of the generativity of such principles. Think of polyrhythm as the best mode of understanding for anything which truly synthesizes two with three. It’s really a matter of continuous variation, and the inexhaustible generativity which comes from treating things as rhythms, where one plus one always equals one, always a new one.

I notice that it’s hopelessly abstract and useless to say something like “the answer is in the interlocking.” But when I say these things, what’s happening in my head is really all very concrete and practical, and it begins right where I tried to resume with my painting today, which is in insisting on forging a common origin for the Ludovic fiction on the one hand and the ellipses-and-verticals armature on the other, finding that structure from those photographs, making it so that every time that structure recurs, it is always tied back to Ludovic, and not just by simple induction (by fiat), but by persistently renewed contact, returning to the fonts, doing things with pictorial space that might look like Malevich or even like Olga Balema’s brain damage exhibition at Bridget Donahue, but if they strike such resemblances then they always do so while re-performing Ludovic’s return to his (abstracted, abstract from the beginning and ever just as abstract, if not more so, for its progressive revelation) trauma, which I am always to have him be re-figuring by the repetition-drenched means of folding and stapling and covering with layer upon layer of wash and paste, trying thereby to alchemize some way out of the trauma, which, in its abstractness, is also the face of all repetition. Repetition has two faces, the fructive repetition of

Catholicism and baking and Hantaï's mother's apron-ironing, on the one hand, and on the other hand the fruitless repetition which is precisely hell; here I mean rather the latter, the hopeless determinist sense, the hopeless determinism of the closed formula wo es war, soll ich werden, the determinism which is the cast of the hopelessness that I am always trying to overcome, sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully, and if I ever succeed, if I ever really do make art, then and only then and always then am I succeeding where Ludovic is always trying to succeed, in successfully (alchemically, aesthetically) redeeming his (notional, abstract) trauma (about which little more is ever learned than the sheer gestural dimension; it is as simple as Rilke, as Homer, as Jesus, as Stein, as Bacon, as Hantaï, as Michelangelo: Ass-first into the home of the horse-dealers, and so forth). By acting on its site, its very source, by manipulating the things which matter, not the irrelevant things which are detached and consigned to an endless slide (that latter is capital, what the horse-dealers trade in, commercialism, distraction, which tends always toward attention, control, algorithmic fascism, unfreedom and therefore the impossibility of love. The horse-dealers stand for all of that). And the figure of the maître, the vieux, is always flickering into and out of the category of "horse-dealers" thus defined: The horse-dealers often resemble the vieux, and that's what makes it difficult to tell whether he is or isn't of them; but when he is Hantaï, he is certainly not of them, and when he is my real father, he is not of them, but when he is any number of false models, compromised influences, Satans (deceivers), leaders-astray, that is when he is of them. And that is why I fixate so persistently upon Balthus, and Pound, and Grotjahn, precisely those ambiguous figures who, despite all the attention I heap on them, remain undecidable: I still don't know whether they are maître or horse-dealer.

Now that I have momentum, I have a couple other things that I might not have been able to say on previous days about Ludovic.

The coffee cup is salvation, newness, totemic-talismanic for aesthetic redemption. Caffeine and light are one because they were one in Rome, on Capri at the Casa Malaparte during Le mépris and during Grotjahn's exhibition, on Patmos when John was there and when Poussin painted him there, in the Cyclades and in Paris; or, to say all this in one word, in "Chernobbio" with an "h"; or, all in another word, on Kithira; or, all in another word, at Brasserie Lipp, which gets to the other thing that the coffee cup is, as it is always playing triple duty or more (ritual object of imbibement, aesthetic object in its own materiality even before the imbibement-ritual-scaffolded repetition concentrates ever more aura onto it as a matrix, then later talisman for "caffeine itself" and thence for "light itself, life itself," and now one more:) It was what was before Ludovic's eyes when the horse-dealers came in through that narrow glassed (and brass-ornamented, and reflected infinitely from the wall-mirrors) vestibule, the last frame before the parquet, or the tile, seen from worm's-eye.

So much for the coffee cup, the espresso cup.

There's also something else to be said about Chernobbio with an “h,” which Ludovic will even eventually be able to paint, in red and green, on an expansive wall of canvas folded in baroque endlessness after the manner of a Tilman Riemanschneider limewood altarpiece: That Chernobbio, in its Luini red and green (from Como’s cathedral), colors worn like garments upon the landscape of blue within green beneath a different blue (the lake), colors later flashed like birds’ markings (which play on a level that makes the individual and the collective survival into a single tongue--the level, that is, of signals, rhythms, markings shown for camouflage and for mate-finding) upon a liquid black within flickering light-points of a warm, nearly greenish cast, under a much bigger velvet black flickering with light points of a colder and purer celestial cast (the lake again), the lake seen each time from a high place, with feet in grass, with posts and lintels around, and relations with objects, and persons, and love, and ambient beauty coursing through the air, and possibility, and future.

A high place, I said; and Luini, I also said: Intended to be heard within each of these is Leonardo’s St. Anne: That is the origin of the “high place” in my head, and so it is the talisman for the notion of “high place” as such; and the same painting is also the ur-type for all Luini’s uncanny doublings (recall that I never liked him for his painting’s success in quality), so it stands, too, with Luini’s help, for doubling as such, not without indispensable assistance from Pierre Klossowski, too.

A third aspect of Ludovic’s fiction was latent in “worm’s-eye view” alongside the abjection and subjection to Control that that phrase more obviously denotes: I’m talking now about the investigation of the perspectival quirk therein, which gives rise to the armature, and which gives rise, later, to various totemic conjugations of hangings in space in the manner of Malevich (and El Lissitzky?) and Balema (I think the Russianness is coincidental, but maybe the influence of the icon-hanging practice does run that deep). To find this in the “worm’s-eye,” to mark the “worm’s-eye” as the seed of these subsequent conjugations, is not as tenuous as it first appears; the perspectival investigation is at once of a piece with certain essays of Hubert Damisch, and also with certain essays of Merleau-Ponty, and thence to a certain essay of Martin Heidegger, which has come to stand for all introspection which can eventually beget clarity, or even enlightenment: the kind of introspection which, under completely different terms, gave to both Descartes and to me a sense of incontrovertibility in the distinctness of personhood (of Dasein or of point-of-view), which is not on its own enough to constitute an ethics, but which, as Jean-Luc Nancy intuited, has need of another demand--which it might yet even contain--which is a demand that he called being-with, and that I call love, but which “agape” alone does not quite denote: It needs a bit more of the trogon from the “bread of life” discourse, and, even in that bit, even a little bit of eros.

There are certain points of corporeality or materiality which are too easy to insist upon in the abstract (that is a recent plague), but they are also too easy to completely forget about (which was an older

and much longer-running plague). And so, in my painting, I want always to insist on a manifest “sense of materials” (as someone in 80s Soho called it), on a Catholic sense of the pivotal status of the particular (whether applied to the real historical incarnation of Jesus or to the real presence in the Eucharist): This is the alchemical side of my painting, which earlier today I said might even constitute a third of all of what I’m up to: Alchemy, and what it makes of base material, and what it makes of the irreducible (as caput mortuum, which thereby becomes Derrida’s remainder and thence Nancy’s unnameable and Hantaï’s Dieu and therefore rather directly my God), but also everything that I’ve made to go under the sign of “the living and the dead,” which includes not just those materials that I love (linen and rabbit skin glue and charcoal and silverpoint and linseed oil and the caput mortuum of oil paint and turpentine), but also neoprene, which might be as much as my head can hold for now (even if aluminum might someday need to take its place alongside superclay bronze--this, again, feels like more than I can aesthetically hold in the picture at once right now.

That’s basically the end of this note, but the following is kind of a footnote to it, as well as being a rather more practical-cast note to be applied down the line on the subject of the different hangings, in their connection with both Olga Balema and post-minimal exhibition space on the one hand, and Ludovic’s return-investigations on the other:

I want some of them to be small and vertically formatted and hung at shin height, so that their armature can be skewed in a certain way, so that it only appears rectilinear (verticals being parallel) only when you approach it to a certain point and look down at the same angle--say--from which the horse-dealers might have looked down upon Ludovic. How is that for performance (enactment, fiction-writing, the making-transferable of an experience not necessarily but at least in some way notionally original to an “author”)?

Other paintings must be equally narrow and small, but hung so high that they (a) resemble Malevich’s upper-corner hang and (b) put your neck in the exaltative posture of someone in a Gothic cathedral, say, and (c) enact the neck- and gaze-angle of someone in Ludovic’s worm’s-eye position looking up at someone who may be either Maître or horse-dealer--he cannot know yet--and therein, in this undecidability, is registered an important relationship between the postures of exaltation and abjection, an undeniable coincidence of (b) with ©, which is always worthy of closer examination.

And then there are a handful of combinatory tall paintings, very tall ones, which fix you at a certain distance from the wall (just as did these last two I mentioned), or which, by contrast, fix you in no place from the wall, by exerting at once (at least) two contradictory impositions, exaggerating an aspect that is present in Holbein’s Ambassadors but which is too easy in that painting to write off as something operating on the level of a tacked-on parlor trick, just one more bauble to add to that painting’s wealth of interesting knicknacks and references piled up on the table; in these very tall paintings, by

contrast, being so stripped down as they are, it (this contradictory set of demands) will stand out rather as something integral to the content or (better) to the function of the work, something without which all is missed. To reiterate: The variables are: armature far above eye height and armature far below eye height; armature rectilinear, and armature anamorphosed (so that it only appears rectilinear from a fixed position which is a certain distance from the wall for any given viewer's eye-height): And the different combinations involve paintings where both upper and lower armature are anamorphosed to the same viewing distance, ones where they are both anamorphosed but to different viewing distances, ones where only one is anamorphosed and the other stands as a standard or reference-point or tuning fork or sounding board; and, last, ones where neither is anamorphosed, i.e. both have lines with their verticals drawn parallel to the (tall) canvases' (long) edges, and these last ones are the most inert, the most silent of all, but they speak a certain gnomic truth of their own.

As a footnote to this footnote, maybe only the well-initiated would be able to read anything about Ludovic into these paintings, but the important part is that it is there to be read into them, that these forms were not repetition-generated in absence of Ludovic-consciousness, even if it be true that they could to some degree operate on a Ludovic-independent level for the uninitiated, and to them act in a way not unlike the work of Olga Bolema, which is to say that they can activate a certain Schindlerian consciousness of space, and its materiality, and its deformability. (It occurs to me that these are all Merleau-Pontyian, even Cézanneian, ideas--so maybe there are other big rebus-pictures to be made later on that enact all this within picture-space, like Cézanne did, and don't involve all of this post-Minimal hanging-installation work.)

I break off my note, because I begin to wonder too unignorably whether I'll ever have the heart to make good on everything, and in particular, to make good on this.

As a separate note, for some reason all in an instant I began to wonder whether my painting thus conceived does anything new, what it can be said to be worthwhile for, besides managing under adverse circumstances to positively assert its own aesthetic quality (which, on its own, is not nothing, but still). Could it be said to be important--in the way of art historical importance--say, of a like kind, even if not of a like magnitude, to Cézanne or Duchamp? And here is what I think it can aspire to: I think it can be alike to Judd in a certain way (which is a dubious thing to aspire to, or seems so, when you read certain perspectives on Judd's legacy--but still, I think, it is not nothing). Here's what I mean: My writing is shot through with articulated affinities for certain artists' work. (Today Olga Balema is the name I repeat, but on many other days it's been many other names, none of which, as it happens, fulfill all, or even nearly all, or even very many, of the conditions that I always insist all of my works are to meet all of, if they are, any of them, to be any good.) In this, I remind myself of Donald Judd's writings: There were many

artists who he really valued, whose work he even loved, even if none of them made work that could pass as “a good Judd.” But Judd’s great contribution was to forge a new way of understanding artistic quality, and that was a really new, positive contribution, which gave much life to much art for many years, and is even now still bearing fruit. What I hope to do, by imposing so many simultaneous demands on my own work, is to make concrete and transmissible a way of looking at aesthetic objects whereby one can have alike affinities to all the other artists that I articulate affinities with which is, I attest (in my test-case case-study manner that I always talk about), nurturing and life-sustaining. This is my vision that, I think, makes good on the specific utopianism of Mondrian; but rather than working specifically from painting outward through wall and room to city, mine works after the rhythm-logic of “espresso cup,” and by this I mean in an analogous progression to Mondrian’s, but a new progression emanating outward in time rather than in space. You have these moments of affinity, and you build your livable life outward from there. And in order for this to be tractable, the moments of affinity have to correspond with your sensibility-manifold in a way that is truly resonant and truly open, or else, I believe, they can never happen. And in order for those affinities each to be truly resonant and truly open, I think, the sensibility-manifold has to have a structure that is like the one that I am always trying to describe for myself--Not that it has to resemble my own in any of its sensible faces, but, pretty simply, that its deep generative structure has to correspond to the once-called-re-Symbolist one that I am struggling still to identify, the one that is always a matter of layers, crystalline objects with uncountably many arc-traversals, uncountably many facets or faces or points of viewing, from any of which points aesthetic quality may be apprehended. An aesthetic object is an instantaneous and static superposition of all of these points of viewing, and a person is a diachronic and antistatic superposition of the collection of all such possible points of viewing of all such possible objects, and the sensibility-manifold is registered each time at once with the registration of any face of any aesthetic object.

I think that any weakness in the account I've just rendered, its vapidity or its triviality, has more to do with my current state of mind and abilities than it has to do with a triviality of the system itself. But that's really not for me to say right now. I defer, with my habitual sad smile. And I go for lunch.

I become always intoxicated and compromised by a certain slide toward abstraction, or, perhaps, by gradual deoxygenation as I talk at much greater length than I am habituated to, or some combination thereof.

But one thing I wanted to say much earlier is that I think there’s something important to be said for the way in which all of the figuration in the paintings, which interlink it with the Ludovic fiction, is always indexical rather than mimetic. Presenting only ever without depicting. (But none of these words seem to have their meanings anymore.) What I mean is that figure drawing has to have its

place tucked somewhere deep in the recesses of the eventual development and deployment (déploiement) of these repetitions; and that there are certain capacities for indexical representation that have to fill all of the perception-space of the objects that I make, by hook or by crook, and I have several of each in my cabinet that I sit with my back to.

12 April 2026

Not narrative painting; literary painting, even less; but “fictional painting” has an inbuilt ambiguity that I think is just right.

I cannot keep my mind off Beuys these last days.

I want to name certain books that are important points of reference for “fictional painting.” I would name Zans Brady Krohn, because I was thinking about her writing when I first put Ludovic Nemo’s pen to paper, but for incidental reasons I feel I cannot. Instead I name Ingeborg Bachmann’s Malina, Robert Walser in general and “Kleist in Thun” in particular, Nabokov’s Pale Fire, and Proust. If I am not worried about the way the reference might land, then and only then I add Blanchot (Au moment voulu and Thomas l’obscur first) and Pierre Klossowski (primarily Le souffleur--this is as obvious as Kleist--but also, more than might be thought, Le bain de Diane and Le Baphomet).

I emerge from cave to roof, mind now open to the sky, and the winds of change (die luft der freiheit even) are literal, palpable, bringing warm air gently from somewhere far beyond Anacapa, maybe from Easter Island for all that I know about the Niños. Everything is blanketed in a diffuse white brightness; last night’s intermittent rains have left a thick and solid cloud layer directly overhead, though a thick band of crystal-clear blue sky is visible above the horizon almost all the way around.

I mark all this to say that things are changing and that I believe it and that much effort will be required of me--I will need to begin working much harder than I have--but this effort will be synergetic with forces exterior to me that have begun to stir (it is not, I mean, that this act of will has long been possible). My wage has been raised by three dollars (about sixteen percent), one of which was the direct result of swift and decisive expression of dissatisfaction, and who knows but that another may be added before long because I spoke my heart without waste of words (and, I’d like to believe, because I alone can thwart the just-purchased dynamometer: I

exceeded its fifteen pound range with the tautness of 120” 667 linen on a five by six foot bar, the aluminum bowing so sharply that the thing couldn’t hang on a wall and had to be loosened).

And it may be soon that none of this will matter, because it has just become a possibility--the farthest thing from a probability, but still it is so intoxicatingly possible, the sheer possibility of it--that we will no longer need to pay any rent, if we are given more or less nominal caretaking responsibilities for a schizophrenic aunt of Bella’s whom she has never met.

But almost more than all of that I am thinking, thinking, thinking, thinking of the mute eloquence (or really the eloquent muteness) of duck fat and caput mortuum and skin-glue gesso on the coarse but pliant linen that is only in my world because of Paul Sietsema (and because of this I owe him a permanent debt--for its perfect color, truly perfect where both canvas and our usual linen kept trading a status of a true roadblock for my paintings, one far too lifelessly office-gray and the other far too lifelessly craft-manila, even the Paris). Thinking of alchemy and Beuys (felt and fat are eloquent muteness even beyond what Trisha Donnelly achieves, and what I’m talking about is precisely what she’s reaching for). But everything depends on that which I have not quite yet solved: How to make the armature precisely coincide with its pretext so that literally all of “the facts” without exception become justified, redeemed, interlocking-perfect, tightly mutually self-necessitated, because that is the standard of aesthetic quality, the standard which so little else meets because it is almost impossible to see & lay hands on all of “the facts” because the passage of time ineluctably keeps exposing more and more of them (sometimes more quickly than usual; local maximum rates can be pointed out during the first advent of abstraction with Mondrian excelling beyond all others, during the pivot-point of Greenberg and Fried and Minimalism with Frank Stella’s black paintings and then Donald Judd’s horizon-shift, and then institutional critique, and most recently, as far as I am aware, and that is why it is precisely here that I am choosing to add myself in, with Krebber and von Bonin’s putting into play of the artist’s artist-identity itself; Strau is also imbricated with this latest gaining of momentum and has a special status to mark because he stands talismanically for the opening up of a certain field of fiction within painting which--let it not be misunderstood--is anything but the tacking on of writing onto painting but is rather a much more unified and all-encompassing activation of the fictional (in other words: Arbitrary, capricious, spoken into existence, could-have-been-otherwise) within the artistic act (inherently, as part of “the facts”).

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